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H. DE BALZAC

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GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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H. DE BALZAC

PIERRETTE

AND

THE ABBÉ BIROTTEAU

(*Le Curé de Tours*)

Translated by

CLARA BELL

with a Preface by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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LIST OF ETCHINGS

PIERRETTE AND HE . . . HAD SKETCHED THEIR CHILDISH DREAMS ON THE VEIL OF THE FUTURE, . . . *Frontispiece*

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Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher.

PREFACE

Les Célibataires, the longest number of the original *Comédie* under a single title, next to *Illusions perdues*, is not, like that book, connected by any unity of story. Indeed, the general bond of union is pretty weak; and though it is quite true that bachelors and old maids are the heroes and heroines of all three, it would be rather hard to establish any other bond of connection, and it is rather unlikely that any one unprompted would fix on this as a sufficient ground of partnership.

Two at least of the component parts, however, are of very high excellence. I do not myself think that *Pierrette*, which opens the series, is quite the equal of its companions. Written, as it was, for Countess Anna de Hanska, Balzac's step-daughter of the future, while she was still very young, it partakes necessarily of the rather elaborate artificiality of all attempts to suit the young person, of French attempts in particular, and it may perhaps be said of Balzac's attempts most of all. It belongs, in a way, to the Arcis series—the series which also includes the fine *Ténébreuse Affaire* and the unfinished *Député d'Arcis*—but is not very closely connected therewith. The picture of the actual *Célibataires*, the brother and sister Rogron, with which it opens, is in one of Balzac's

best-known styles, and is executed with all his usual mastery both of the minute and of the at least partially repulsive, showing also that strange knowledge of the *bourgeois de Paris* which, somehow or other, he seems to have attained by dint of unknown forgatherings in his ten years of apprenticeship. But when we come to *Pierrette* herself, the story is, I think, rather less satisfying. Her persecutions and her end, and the devotion of the faithful Brigaut and the rest, are pathetic no doubt, but tend (I hope it is not heartless to say it) just a very little towards *sensiblerie*. The fact is that the thing is not quite in Balzac's line.

The other and shorter constituent of the book, *The Abbé Birotteau*, is certainly on a higher level, and has attracted the most magnificent eulogies from some of the novelist's admirers. I think both Mr. Henry James and Mr. Wedmore have singled out this little piece for detailed and elaborate praise, and there is no doubt that it is a happy example of a kind in which the author excelled. The opening, with its evident but not obtruded remembrance of the old and well-founded superstition—derived from the universal belief in some form of Nemesis—that an extraordinary sense of happiness, good luck, or anything of the kind, is a precursor of misfortune, and calls for some instant act of sacrifice or humiliation, is very striking; and the working out of the vengeance of the goddess by the very ungoddess-like though feminine hand of Mademoiselle Gamard has much that is commendable. Nothing in its well exampled kind is better touched off than the Listomère coterie, from the shrewdness of Monsieur de Bourbonne to the selfishness of Madame de Listomère. I do not know that

the old maid herself—cat, and far worse than cat as she is—is at all exaggerated, and the sketch of the coveted *appartement* and its ill-fated *mobilier* is about as good as it can be. And the battle between Madame de Listomère and the Abbé Troubert, which has served as a model for many similar things, has, if it has often been equalled, not often been surpassed.

I cannot, however, help thinking that there is more than a little exaggeration in more than one point of the story. The Abbé Birotteau is surely a little too much of a fool; the Abbé Troubert an Iago a little too much wanting in verisimilitude; and the central incident of the clause about the furniture too manifestly improbable. Taking the first and the last points together, is it likely that any one not quite an idiot should, in the first place, remain so entirely ignorant of the value of his property; should, in the second, though, ignorant or not, he attached the greatest possible *pretium affectionis* to it, contract to resign it for such a ridiculous consideration; and should, in the third, take the fatal step without so much as remembering the condition attached thereto? If it be answered that Birotteau *was* idiot enough to do such a thing, then it must be observed further that one's sympathy is frozen by the fact. Such a man deserved such treatment. And, again, even if French justice was, and perhaps is, as much influenced by secret considerations as Balzac loves to represent it, we must agree with that member of the Listomère society who pointed out that no tribunal could possibly uphold such an obviously iniquitous bargain. As for Troubert, the idea of the Jesuitical ecclesiastic (though Balzac was not personally hostile to

the Jesuits) was a common one at the time, and no doubt popular, but the actual personage seems to me nearer to Eugène Sue's Rodin in some ways than I could have desired.

These things, however, are very much a case of 'As You Like It' or 'As It Strikes You,' and I have said that *The Abbé Birotteau* strikes some good judges as of exceptional merit, while no one can refuse it merit in a high degree. I should not, except for the opening, place it in the very highest class of the *Comédie*, but it is high beyond all doubt in the second.

Pierrette, which was earlier called *Pierrette Lorrain*, was issued in 1840, first in the *Siècle*, and then in volume form, published by Souverain. In both issues it had nine chapter or book divisions with headings. With the other *Célibataires* it entered the *Comédie* as a *Scène de la Vie de Province* in 1843.

The *Abbé Birotteau* (which Balzac had at one time intended to call by the name of the Curé's enemy, and which at first was simply called by the general title *Les Célibataires*) is much older than its companions, and appeared in 1832 in the *Scènes de la Vie Privée*. It was soon properly shifted to the *Vie de Province*, and as such in due time joined the *Comédie* bearing the title of *Le Curé de Tours*.

G. S.

PIERRETTE

To Mademoiselle Anna de Hanska.

Dear child,—You, the joy of a whole house, you, whose white or rose-coloured cape flutters in the summer like a will-o'-the-wisp through the arbours of Wierzchownia, followed by the wistful eyes of your father and mother—how can I dedicate to you a tale full of sadness? But is it not well to tell you of sorrows such as a girl so fondly loved as you are will never know? For some day your fair hands may take them comfort. It is so difficult, Anna, to find in the picture of our manners any incident worthy to meet your eye, that an author has no choice; but perhaps you may discern how happy you are from reading this tale, sent by

Your old friend,

De Balzac.

In October 1827, at break of day, a youth of about sixteen, whose dress proclaimed him to be what modern phraseology insolently calls a proletarian, was standing on a little square in the lower part of the town of Provins. At this early hour he could, without being observed, study the various houses set round the Place in an oblong square. The mills on the streams of Provins were already at work. Their noise, repeated by the echoes from the upper town, and harmonising with the sharp air and the clear freshness of the morning,

bewrayed the perfect silence—so complete that the clatter of a diligence was audible, still a league away on the high road.

The two longer rows of houses, divided by an arched avenue of lime-trees, are artless in style, confessing the peaceful and circumscribed life of the townsfolk. In this part of the town there are no signs of trade. At that time there was hardly a carriage-gate suggesting the luxury of the rich—or if there were, it rarely turned on its hinges—excepting that of Monsieur Martener, a doctor who was obliged to keep and use a cab. Some of the fronts were graced by a long vine stem, others with climbing roses growing up to the first floor, and scenting the windows with their large scattered bunches of flowers. One end of this Square almost joins the High Street of the lower town ; the other end is shut in by a street parallel with the High Street, and the gardens beyond run down to one of the two rivers that water the valley of Provins.

At this end, the quietest part of the Place, the young workman recognised the house that had been described to him—a front of white stone, scored with seams to represent joins in the masonry, and windows with light iron balconies, decorated with rosettes painted yellow, and closed with grey Venetian shutters. Above this front—a ground floor and a first floor only—three attic windows pierce a slate-roof, and on one of the gables twirls a brand-new weather-cock. This modern weather-cock represents a sportsman aiming at a hare. The front door is reached up three stone steps. On one side of the door an end of leaden pipe spouts dirty water into a little gutter, revealing the kitchen ; on the other, two windows, carefully guarded by grey wooden shutters in which heart-shaped holes are cut to admit a little light, seemed to our youth to be those of the dining-room. In the basement secured by the three steps, under each window is an air-opening into the cellars, closed by painted iron

shutters pierced with holes in a pattern. Everything was then quite new. An observer, looking at this house freshly repaired, its still raw splendour contrasting with the antique aspect of all the rest, would at once have seen in it the mean ideas and perfect contentment of a retired tradesman.

The young fellow gazed at every detail with an expression of pleasure mingled with sadness; his eyes wandered from the kitchen to the garret with a look that denoted meditation. The pink gleams of sunshine showed in one of the attic windows a cotton curtain which was wanting to the others. Then the lad's face brightened completely; he withdrew a few steps, leaned his back against a lime-tree, and sang, in the drawling tones peculiar to the natives of the West, this ballad of Brittany, published by Bruguière, a composer to whom we owe some charming airs. In Brittany the young swains of the villages sing this song to newly-married couples on their wedding day—

'We come to wish you every happiness,
To th' maister at your side,
As well as to the bride.

'You, mistress bride, are bound for life and death,
With a bright golden chain,
That none may break in twain.

'Now you to fairs and junkets go no more;
Nay, you must stay at home,
While we may dance and roam.

'And do you know how trusty you must be,
And faithful to your mate,
To love him rathe and late?

'Then take this posy I have made for you.
Alack! for happy hours
Must perish like these flowers.'

This national air, as sweet as that arranged by Chateaubriand to the words *Ma sœur, te souvient-il encore?* sung

in a little town of la Brie in Champagne, could not fail to arouse irresistible memories in a native of Brittany, so faithfully does it paint the manners, the simplicity, the scenery of that noble old province. There is in it an intangible melancholy, caused by the realities of life, which is deeply touching. And is not this power to awaken a whole world of grave, sweet, sad things by a familiar and often cheerful strain, characteristic of those popular airs which are the superstitions of music, if we accept the word superstition as meaning what remains from the ruin of nations, the flotsam left by revolutions?

As he ended the first verse, the workman, who never took his eyes off the curtain in the attic, saw no one astir. While he was singing the second, it moved a little. As he sang the words, 'Take this posy,' a young girl's face was seen. A fair hand cautiously opened the window, and the girl nodded to the wanderer as he ended with the melancholy reflection contained in the two last lines—

> 'Alack! for happy hours
> Must perish like these flowers.'

The lad suddenly took from under his jacket, and held up to her, a golden-yellow spray of a flower very common in Brittany, which he had picked no doubt in a field in la Brie, where it is somewhat rare—the flower of the furze.

'Why, is it you, Brigaut?' said the girl in a low voice.

'Yes, Pierrette, yes. I am living in Paris; I am walking about France; but I might settle down here, since you are here.'

At this moment the window-fastening of the room on the first floor, below Pierrette's, was heard to creak. The girl showed the greatest alarm, and said to Brigaut, 'Fly!'

The young fellow jumped like a frog to a bend in the

street, round a mill, before entering the wider street that is the artery of the lower town; but in spite of his agility, his hobnailed shoes, ringing on the paving-cobbles of Provins, made a noise easily distinguished from the music of the mill, and heard by the individual who opened the window.

This person was a woman. No man ever tears himself from the delights of his morning slumbers to listen to a minstrel in a round jacket. None but a maid is roused by a love song. And this was a maid—and an old maid. When she had thrown open her shutters with the action of a bat, she looked about her on all sides, and faintly heard Brigaut's steps as he made his escape. Is there on earth anything more hideous than the matutinal apparition of an ugly old maid at her window? Of all the grotesque spectacles that are the amusement of travellers as they go through little towns, is it not the most unpleasing? It is too depressing, too repulsive to be laughed at.

This particular old maid, whose ear was so keen, appeared bereft of the artifices of all kinds that she used to improve herself; she had no front of false hair, and no collar. Her headgear was the frightful little caul of black sarsnet which old women draw over their skull, showing beyond her night-cap, which had been pushed aside in her sleep. This untidiness gave her head the sinister appearance ascribed by painters to witches. The temples, ears, and nape, scarcely concealed, betrayed their withered leanness, the coarse wrinkles were conspicuous for a redness that did not charm the eye, and that was thrown into relief by the comparative whiteness of a bedgown tied at the throat with twisted tapes. The gaps where this bedgown fell open revealed a chest like that of some old peasant woman careless of her ugliness. The fleshless arm might have been a stick covered with stuff. Seen at the window, the lady appeared tall by reason of the strength and breadth of her face, which

reminded the spectator of the extravagant size of some Swiss countenances. The chief characteristic of the features, which presented a singular lack of harmony, was a hardness of line, a harshness of colouring, and a lack of feeling in the expression which would have filled a physiognomist with disgust. These peculiarities, visible now, were habitually modified by a sort of business smile, and a vulgar stupidity which aped goodnature so successfully that the people among whom she lived might easily have supposed her to be a kind woman.

She and her brother shared the ownership of this house. The brother was sleeping so soundly in his room that the Opera-house orchestra would not have roused him ; and the power of that orchestra is famous ! The old maid put her head out of the window, and raised her eyes to that of the attic—eyes of a cold pale blue, with short lashes set in lids that were almost always swollen. She tried to see Pierrette ; but recognising the futility of the attempt, she withdrew into her room with a movement not unlike that of a tortoise hiding its head after putting it out of its shell. The shutters were closed again, and the silence of the Square was no more disturbed but by peasants coming into the town, or early risers. When there is an old maid in the house a watch-dog is not needed ; not the smallest event occurs without her seeing it, commenting on it, and deducing every possible consequence. Thus this incident was destined to give rise to serious inferences, and to be the opening of one of those obscure dramas which are played out in the family, but which are none the less terrible for being unseen—if indeed the name of drama may be applied to this tragedy of home-life.

Pierrette did not get into bed again. To her Brigaut's arrival was an event of immense importance. During the night—the Eden of the wretched—she escaped from the annoyances and fault-finding she had to endure all day. Like the hero of some German or Russian ballad,

to her sleep seemed a happy life, and the day a bad dream. This morning, for the first time in three years, she had had a happy waking. The memories of infancy had sweetly sung their poetry to her soul. She had heard the first verse in her dreams; the second had roused her with a start; at the third she had doubted—the unfortunate are of the school of Saint Thomas; at the fourth verse, standing at her window, barefoot, and in her shift, she had recognised Brigaut, the friend of her childhood.

Yes, that was indeed the short square jacket with quaint little tails and pockets swinging just over the hips, the classical blue-cloth jacket of the Breton; the waistcoat of coarse knit, the linen shirt buttoned with a golden heart, the wide-rolled collar, the earrings, heavy shoes, trousers of blue drill, mottled in streaks of lighter shades; in short, all the humble and durable items of a poor Breton's costume. The large white horn buttons of the jacket and waistcoat had set Pierrette's heart beating. At the sight of the branch of furze the tears had started to her eyes; then a spasm of terror clutched her heart, crushing the flowers of remembrance that had blossomed for a moment. It struck her that her cousin might have heard her rise and go to the window. She knew the old woman, and made the signal of alarm to Brigaut, which the poor boy had hastened to obey without understanding it. Does not this instinctive obedience betray one of those innocent and mastering affections such as are to be seen once in an age, on this earth where they bloom, like the aloe-trees on Isola Bella, but two or three times in a century. Any one seeing Brigaut fly would have admired the artless heroism of a most artless love.

Jacques Brigaut was worthy of Pierrette Lorrain, who was now nearly fourteen—two children! Pierrette could not help weeping as she saw him take to his heels with the terror inspired by her warning gesture.

She then sat down in a rickety armchair, in front of

a looking-glass above a little table. On this she set her elbows, and remained pensive for an hour, trying to recall the Marais, the hamlet of Pen-Hoël, the adventurous voyages on a pond in a boat untied from an old willow-tree by little Jacques; then the old faces—her grandmother and grandfather, her mother's look of suffering, and General Brigaut's handsome head; a whole childhood of careless joy! And this again was a dream—the lights of happiness against a grey background.

She had fine light-brown hair, all in disorder, under a little nightcap tumbled in her sleep, a little cambric cap with frills that she herself had made. On each side curls fell over her temples, escaping from their grey papers. At the back of her head a thick plait hung down to her shoulders. The excessive pallor of her face showed that she was a victim to a girlish ailment to which medical science gives the pretty name of chlorosis, which robs the blood of its natural hue, disturbing the appetite, and betraying much disorderment of the whole system. This waxen hue was apparent in all the flesh-tints. The whiteness of her neck and shoulders, the colourlessness of an etiolated plant, accounted for the thinness of her arms crossed in front of her. Pierrette's feet even looked weak and shrunken by disease; her shift, falling only to her calf, showed the relaxed sinews, blue veins, and bloodless muscles. As the cold air chilled her, her lips turned purple. The mournful smile that parted her fairly delicate mouth showed teeth of ivory whiteness, even and small, pretty transparent teeth, in harmony with well-shaped ears and a nose that was elegant, if a little sharp; her face, though perfectly round, was very sweet. All the life of this charming countenance lay in the eyes; the iris, of a bright snuff-brown mottled with black, shone with golden lights round a deep bright retina. Pierrette ought to have been gay; she was sad. Her vanished gaiety lingered

in the vivid modelling of her eyes, in the ingenuous form of her brow, and the moulding of her short chin. The long eyelashes lay like brushes on the cheeks worn by debility; the whiteness, too lavishly diffused, gave great purity to the lines and features of her countenance. The ear was a little masterpiece of modelling; it might have been of marble.

Pierrette suffered in many ways. Perhaps you would like to have her story? Here it is.

Pierrette's mother was a Demoiselle Auffray of Provins, half-sister to Madame Rogron, the mother of the present owners of this house. Monsieur Auffray, after marrying for the first time at the age of eighteen, took a second wife at the age of sixty-nine. The child of his first marriage was an only daughter, ugly enough, who, when she was sixteen, married an innkeeper of Provins named Rogron. By his second marriage old Auffray had another daughter, but she was very pretty. Thus the quaint result was an enormous difference in age between Monsieur Auffray's two daughters. The child of his first wife was fifty when the second was born. By the time her father gave her a sister Madame Rogron had two children of her own, both of full age.

The uxorious old man's younger child was married for love, at eighteen, to a Breton officer named Lorrain, a captain in the Imperial Guard. Love often begets ambition. The captain, eager to get his colonelcy, exchanged into the line. While the Major and his wife, comfortable enough with the allowance given them by Monsieur and Madame Auffray, were living handsomely in Paris, or running about Germany as the Emperor's wars or truces might guide them, old Auffray, a retired grocer at Provins, died suddenly, before he had time to make his will. The good man's estate was so cleverly manipulated by the innkeeper and his wife that they absorbed the larger part of it, leaving to old Auffray's

widow no more than the house in the little Square and a few acres of land. This widow, little Madame Lorrain's mother, was but eight-and-thirty when her husband died. Like many other widows, she had an unwholesome wish to marry again. She sold to her stepdaughter, old Madame Rogron, the land and house she had inherited under her marriage settlement, to marry a young doctor named Néraud, who ran through her fortune, and she died of grief in great poverty two years afterwards.

Thus Madame Lorrain's share of the Auffray property had in great part disappeared, being reduced to about eight thousand francs.

Major Lorrain died on the field of honour at Montereau, leaving his widow, then one-and-twenty, burthened with a little girl fourteen months old, and with no fortune but the pension she could claim from Government, and whatever money might come to her from Monsieur and Madame Lorrain, tradespeople at Pen-Hoël, a town of la Vendée, in the district known as le Marais. These Lorrains, the parents of the deceased officer, and Pierrette's paternal grandfather and grandmother, sold building-timber, slates, tiles, cornices, pipes, and the like. Their business was a poor one, either from their incapacity or from ill luck, and brought them in a bare living. The failure of the great house of Colinet at Nantes, brought about by the events of 1814, which caused a sudden fall in the price of colonial produce, resulted in a loss to them of eighty thousand francs they had placed on deposit. Their daughter-in-law was therefore warmly received; the Major's widow brought with her a pension of eight hundred francs, an enormous sum at Pen-Hoël. When her half-sister and brother-in-law Rogron sent her the eight thousand francs due to her, after endless formalities, prolonged by distance, she placed the money in the Lorrains' hands, taking a mortgage, however, on a little house they

owned at Nantes, let for a hundred crowns a year, and worth, perhaps, ten thousand francs.

Young Madame Lorrain died there after her mother's second and luckless marriage, in 1819, and almost at the same time as her mother. This daughter of the old man and his young wife was small, fragile, and delicate; the damp air of the Marais did not agree with her. Her husband's family, eager to keep her there, persuaded her that nowhere else in the world would she find a place healthier or pleasanter than the Marais, the scene of Charette's exploits. She was so well taken care of, nursed, and coaxed, that her death brought honour to the Lorrains.

Some persons asserted that Brigaut, an old Vendéen, one of those men of iron who served under Charette, Mercier, the Marquis de Montauran, and the Baron du Guénic in the wars against the Republic, counted for much in young Madame Lorrain's submission. If this were so, it was certainly for the sake of a most loving and devoted soul. And, indeed, all Pen-Hoël could see that Brigaut, respectfully designated as the Major—having held that rank in the Royalist army—spent his days and his evenings in the Lorrains' sitting-room by the side of the Emperor's Major's widow. Towards the end the curé of Pen-Hoël allowed himself to speak of this matter to old Madame Lorrain; he begged her to persuade her daughter-in-law to marry Brigaut, promising to get him an appointment as justice of the peace to the district of Pen-Hoël, by the intervention of the Vicomte de Kergarouët. But the poor woman's death made the scheme useless.

Pierrette remained with her grandparents, who owed her four hundred francs a year, naturally spent on her maintenance. The old people, now less and less fit for business, had an active and pushing rival in trade, whom they could only abuse, without doing anything to protect themselves. The Major, their friend and adviser,

died six months after young Madame Lorrain, perhaps of grief, or perhaps of his wounds; he had had seven-and-twenty. Their bad neighbour, as a good man of business, now aimed at ruining his rivals, so as to extinguish all competition. He got the Lorrains to borrow on their note of hand, foreseeing that they could never pay, and so forced them, in their old age, to become bankrupt. Pierrette's mortgage was second to a mortgage held by her grandmother, who clung to her rights to secure a morsel of bread for her husband. The house at Nantes was sold for nine thousand five hundred francs, and the costs came to fifteen hundred francs. The remaining eight thousand francs came to Madame Lorrain, who invested them in a mortgage in order to live at Nantes in a sort of almshouse, like that of Sainte-Périne in Paris, called Saint-Jacques, where the two old people found food and lodging at a very moderate rate.

As it was impossible that they should take with them their little destitute grandchild, the old Lorrains bethought them of her uncle and aunt Rogron, to whom they wrote. The Rogrons of Provins were dead. Thus the letter from the Lorrains to the Rogrons would seem to be lost. But if there is anything here below which can take the place of Providence, is it not the General Post Office? The genius of the Post, immeasurably superior to that of the Public, outdoes in inventiveness the imagination of the most brilliant novelist. As soon as the Post has charge of a letter, worth, on delivery, from three to ten sous, if it fails at once to find him or her to whom it should be delivered, it displays a mercenary solicitude which has no parallel but in the boldest duns. The Post comes, goes, hunts through the eighty-six departments. Difficulties incite the genius of its officials, who, not unfrequently, are men of letters, and who then throw themselves into the pursuit with the ardour of the mathematicians at the National Observatory; they rummage the kingdom. At the faintest gleam of hope

the Paris offices are on the alert again. You often sit amazed as you inspect the scrawls that meander over the letter, back and front—the glorious evidence of the administrative perseverance that animates the Post Office. If a man were to undertake what the Post has accomplished, he would have spent ten thousand francs in travelling, in time and in money, to recover twelve sous. The Post certainly has more intelligence than it conveys.

The letter written by the Lorrains to Monsieur Rogron, who had been dead a year, was transmitted by the Post to Monsieur Rogron, his son, a haberdasher in the Rue Saint-Denis, Paris. This is where the genius of the Post Office shines. An heir is always more or less puzzled to know whether he has really scraped up the whole of his inheritance, whether he has not forgotten some debt or some fragments. The Revenue guesses everything; it even reads character. A letter addressed to old Rogron of Provins was bound to pique the curiosity of Rogron *junior* of Paris, or of Mademoiselle Rogron, his heirs. So the Revenue earned its sixty centimes.

The Rogrons, towards whom the Lorrains held out beseeching hands though they were in despair at having to part from their granddaughter, thus became the arbiters of Pierrette Lorrain's fate. It is indispensable, therefore, to give some account of their antecedents and their character.

Old Rogron, the innkeeper at Provins, on whom old Auffray had bestowed the child of his first marriage, was hot-faced, with a purple-veined nose, and cheeks which Bacchus had overlaid with his crimson and bulbous blossoms. Though stout, short, and pot-bellied, with stumpy legs and heavy hands, he had all the shrewdness of the Swiss innkeeper, resembling that race. His face remotely suggested a vast hail-stricken vineyard. Certainly he was not handsome; but his wife was like him. Never were a better matched couple. Rogron liked

good living and to have pretty girls to wait on him. He was one of the sect of Egoists whose ways are brutal, and who give themselves up to their vices and do their will in the face of Israel. Greedy, mercenary, and by no means refined, obliged to be the purveyor to his own fancies, he ate up all he earned till his teeth failed him. Then avarice remained. In his old age he sold his inn, collected, as we have seen, all his father-in-law's leavings, and retired to the little house in the Square, which he bought for a piece of bread of old Auffray's widow, Pierrette's grandmother.

Rogron and his wife owned about two thousand francs a year, derived from the letting of twenty-seven plots of land in the neighbourhood of Provins, and the interest on the price of their inn, which they had sold for twenty thousand francs. Old Auffray's house, though in a very bad state, was used as it was for a dwelling by the inn-keepers, who avoided repairing it as they would have shunned the plague; old rats love cracks and ruins. The retired publican, taking a fancy for gardening, spent his savings in adding to his garden; he extended it to the bank of the river, making a long square shut in by two walls, and ending with a stone embankment, below which the water-plants, left to run wild, displayed their abundant flowers.

Early in their married life the Rogron couple had a son and a daughter, with two years between them; everything degenerates; their children were hideous. Put out to nurse in the country as cheaply as possible, these unhappy little ones came home with the wretched training of village life, having cried long and often for their foster-mother, who went to work in the fields, and who left them meanwhile shut up in one of the dark, damp, low rooms which form the dwelling of the French peasant. By this process the children's features grew thick, and their voices harsh; they were far from flattering their mother's vanity, and she tried to correct them

of their bad habits by a severity which, by comparison with their father's, seemed tenderness itself. They were left to play in the yards, stables, and outhouses of the inn, or to run about the town; they were sometimes whipped; sometimes they were sent to their grandfather Auffray, who loved them little. This injustice was one of the reasons that encouraged the Rogrons to secure a large share of the 'old rascal's' leavings. Meanwhile, however, Rogron sent his boy to school; and he paid a man, one of his carters, to save the lad from the conscription. As soon as his daughter Sylvie was twelve years old, he sent her to Paris as an apprentice in a house of business. Two years later, his son Jérôme-Denis was packed off by the same road. When his friends the carriers, who were his allies, or the inn customers asked him what he meant to do with his children, old Rogron explained his plans with a brevity which had this advantage over the statements of most fathers, that it was frank—

'When they are of an age to understand me, I shall just give them a kick you know where, saying, "Be off and make your fortune,"' he would reply, as he drank, or wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Then looking at the inquirer with a knowing wink, 'Ha, ha!' he would add, 'they are not greater fools than I am. My father gave me three kicks, I shall give them but one. He put a louis into my hand, I will give them ten; so they will be better off than I was.—That's the right way. And after I am gone, what is left will be left; the notaries will find them fast enough. A pretty joke, indeed, if I am to keep myself short for the children's sake! They owe their being to me; I have brought them up; I ask nothing of them; they have not paid me back, heh, neighbour? I began life as a carter, and that did not hinder me from marrying that old rascal Auffray's daughter.'

Sylvie was placed as an apprentice, with a premium of

a hundred crowns for her board, with some tradespeople in the Rue Saint-Denis, natives of Provins. Two years later she was paying her way; though she earned no money, her parents had nothing to pay for her food and lodging. This, in the Rue Saint-Denis, is called being 'at par.' Two years later Sylvie was earning a hundred crowns a year. In the course of that time her mother had sent her a hundred francs for pocket-money. Thus, at the age of nineteen, Mademoiselle Sylvie Rogron was independent. When she was twenty, she was second 'young lady' in the house of Julliard, raw-silk merchants, at the sign of the *Ver chinois* (or Silkworm), in the Rue Saint-Denis.

The history of the brother was like the sister's. Little Jérôme-Denis Rogron was placed with one of the largest wholesale mercers in the Rue Saint-Denis, the *maison Guépin* at the *Trois Quenouilles*. While Sylvie, at twenty-one, was forewoman with a thousand francs a year, Jérôme-Denis, better served by luck, was, at eighteen, head shop-clerk, earning twelve hundred, with the Guépins, also natives of Provins. The brother and sister met every Sunday and holiday, and spent the day in cheap amusements. They dined outside Paris; they went to Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Belleville, or Vincennes.

At the end of 1815 they united the money they had earned by the sweat of their brow, and bought of Madame Guenée the business and goodwill of a famous house, the *Sœur de famille*, one of the best known retail haberdashers. The sister kept the cash, the shop, and the accounts; the brother was both buyer and head-clerk, as Sylvie was for some time her own forewoman. In 1821, after five years' hard work, competition had become so lively in the haberdashery business that the brother and sister had scarcely been able to pay off the purchase-money and keep up the reputation of the house.

Though Sylvie Rogron was at this time but forty, her ugliness, her constant toil, and a peculiarly crabbed

expression, arising as much from the shape of her features as from her anxieties, made her look like a woman of fifty. Jérôme-Denis Rogron, at the age of thirty-eight, had the most idiotic face that ever bent over a counter to a customer. His low forehead, crushed by fatigue, was seamed by three arid furrows. His scanty grey hair, cut very short, suggested the unutterable stupidity of a cold-blooded animal; in the gaze of his blue-grey eyes there was neither fire nor mind. His round, flat face aroused no sympathy, and did not even bring a smile to the lips of those who study the varieties of Parisian physiognomy; it was depressing. And while, like his father, he was short and thick, his shape, not having the coarse obesity of the innkeeper, showed in every detail an absurd flabbiness. His father's excessive redness gave place in him to the flaccid lividness acquired by people who live in airless backshops, in the barred coops that serve as counting-houses, always folding and unfolding skeins of thread, paying or receiving money, harrying clerks, or repeating the same phrases to customers. The small intelligence of this brother and sister had been completely sunk in mastering their business, in debit and credit, and in the study of the rules and customs of the Paris market. Thread, needles, ribbon, pins, buttons, tailors' trimmings, in short, the vast list of articles constituting Paris haberdashery, had filled up their memory. Letters to write and answer, bills and stock-taking, had absorbed all their capabilities.

Outside their line of business they knew absolutely nothing; they did not even know Paris. To them Paris was something spread out round the Rue Saint-Denis. Their narrow nature found its field in their shop. They knew very well how to nag their assistants and shop-girls and find them at fault. Their joy consisted in seeing all their hands as busy on the counters as mice's paws, handling the goods or folding up the pieces. When they heard seven or eight young voices of lads and girls

simpering out the time-honoured phrases with which shop-assistants reply to a customer's remarks, it was a fine day, nice weather. When ethereal blue brought life to Paris, and Parisians out walking thought of no haberdashery but what they wore, 'Bad weather for business,' the silly master would observe. The great secret, which made Rogron the object of his apprentices' admiration, was his art in tying, untying, re-tying, and making up a parcel. Rogron could pack a parcel and look out at what was going on in the street, or keep an eye on his shop to its furthest depths; he had seen everything by the time he handed it to the buyer, saying, 'Madame—nothing more this morning?'

But for his sister, this simpleton would have been ruined. Sylvie had good sense and the spirit of trade. She advised her brother as to his purchases from the manufacturers, and relentlessly sent him off to the other end of France to make a sou of profit on some article. The shrewdness, of which every woman possesses more or less, having no duty to do for her heart, she had utilised it in speculation. Stock to be paid for! this thought was the piston that worked this machine and gave it appalling energy. Rogron was never more than head-assistant; he did not understand his business as a whole; personal interest, the chief motor of the mind, had not carried him forward one step. He often stood dismayed when his sister desired him to sell some article at a loss, foreseeing that it would go out of fashion; and afterwards he guilelessly admired her. He did not reason well or ill; he was incapable of reasoning; but he had sense enough to submit to his sister, and he did so for a reason that had nothing to do with business. 'She is the eldest,' he would say. Physiologists and moralists may possibly find in such a persistently solitary life, reduced to satisfying mere needs, and deprived of money and pleasure in youth, an explanation of the animal expression of face, the weak brain, and idiotic manner

of this haberdasher. His sister had always hindered his marrying, fearing perhaps that she might lose her influence in the house, and seeing a source of expense and ruin in a wife certainly younger, and probably less hideous, than herself.

Stupidity may betray itself in two ways—it is talkative or it is mute. Mute stupidity may be endured; but Rogron's was talkative. The tradesman had fallen into the habit of scolding his assistants, of expatiating to them on the minutiæ of the haberdashery business and selling to 'the trade,' ornamenting his lectures with the flat jokes that constitute the *bagout*, the gab of the shops. (This word *bagout*, used formerly to designate the stereotyped repartee, has given way before the soldier's slang word *blague* or humbug.) Rogron, to whom his little domestic audience were bound to listen, Rogron, very much pleased with himself, had finally adopted a set of phrases of his own. The chatterbox believed himself eloquent. The need for explaining to customers the thing they want, for finding out their wishes, for making them want the thing they do not want, loosens the tongue of the counter-jumper. The retail dealer at last acquires the faculty of pouring out sentences in which words have no meaning, but which answer their purpose. Then he can explain to his customers methods of manufacture unknown to them, and this gives him a sort of short-lived superiority over the purchaser; but apart from the thousand and one explanations necessitated by the thousand and one articles he sells, he is, so far as thought is concerned, like a fish on straw in the sunshine.

Rogron and Sylvie—a pair of machines illicitly baptized—had neither potentially nor actively the feelings which give life to the heart. These two beings were utterly dry and tough, hardened by toil, by privations, by the remembrance of their sufferings during a long and weariful apprenticeship. Neither he nor she had pity for any misfortune. They were not implacable, but impenetrable

with regard to anybody in difficulties. To them virtue, honour, loyalty, every human feeling was epitomised in the regular payment of their accounts. Close-fisted, heartless, and sordidly thrifty, the brother and sister had a terrible reputation among the traders of the Rue Saint-Denis.

But for their visits to Provins, whither they went thrice a year, at times when they could shut the shop for two or three days, they would never have got shop-lads and girls. But old Rogron packed off to his children every unhappy creature intended by its parents to go into trade; he carried on for them a business in apprentices in Provins, where he vaunted with much vanity his children's fortune. The parents, tempted by the remote hope of having their son or daughter well taught and well looked after, and the chance of seeing a child some day step into Rogron junior's business, sent the youth who was in the way to the house kept by the old bachelor and old maid. But as soon as the apprentices, man or maid, for whom the fee of a hundred crowns was always paid, saw any way of escaping from these galleys, they fled with a glee which added to the terrible notoriety of the Rogrons. The indefatigable innkeeper always supplied them with fresh victims.

From the age of fifteen Sylvie Rogron, accustomed to grimace over the counter, had two faces—the amiable mask of the saleswoman and the natural expression of a shrivelled old maid. Her assumed countenance was a marvellous piece of mimicry; she smiled all over; her voice turned soft and insinuating, and held the customers under a commercial spell. Her real face was what she had shown between the two half-opened shutters. It would have scared the bravest of the Cossacks of 1815, though they dearly loved every variety of Frenchwoman.

When the letter came from the Lorrains, the Rogrons, in mourning for their father, had come into possession of the house they had almost stolen from Pierrette's grand-

mother, of the innkeeper's acquired land, and finally of certain sums derived from usurious loans in mortgages on land in the hands of peasant owners whom the old drunkard hoped to dispossess. The charge on the business was paid off. The Rogrons had stock to the value of about sixty thousand francs in the shop, about forty thousand francs in their cash-box or in assets, and the value of their goodwill. Seated on the bench, covered with striped green worsted velvet, and fitted into a square recess behind the cash-desk, with just such another desk opposite for the forewoman, the brother and sister held council as to their plans. Every tradesman hopes to retire. If they realised their whole stock and business, they ought to have about a hundred and fifty thousand francs, without counting their inheritance from old Rogron. Thus by investing in the funds the capital at their disposal, each of them would have three to four thousand francs a year, even if they devoted the price of the business—which would no doubt be paid in instalments—to restoring their paternal home. So they might go to Provins and live there in a house of their own.

Their forewoman was the daughter of a rich farmer at Donnemarie, who was burthened with nine children; thus he was obliged to place them all in business, for his wealth, divided among nine, would be little enough for each. But in five years the farmer lost seven of his children, consequently the forewoman had become an interesting person; so much so, that Rogron had attempted, but vainly, to make her his wife. The young lady manifested an aversion for the master which nullified all his manœuvres. On the other hand, Mademoiselle Sylvie did not encourage the plan; she even opposed her brother's marriage, and wanted rather to have so clever a woman as their successor. Rogron's marriage she postponed till they should be settled at Provins.

No passer-by can understand the motive-power that underlies the cryptogamic lives of certain shopkeepers; as we look at them we wonder, 'On what, and why do they live? What becomes of them? Where did they come from?' We lose ourselves in vacancy as we try to account for them. To discover the little poetry that germinates in these brains and vivifies these existences, we must dig into them; but we soon reach the tufa on which everything rests. The Paris shopkeeper feeds on hopes more or less likely to be realised, and without which he would evidently perish: one dreams of building or managing a theatre, another struggles for the honours of the Mairie; this one has a castle in the air three leagues from Paris, a so-called park, where he plants coloured plaster statues and arranges fountains that look like an end of thread, and spends immense sums; that one longs for promotion to the higher grades of the National Guard. Provins, an earthly paradise, excited in the two haberdashers the fanaticism which the inhabitants of every pretty town in France feel for their home. And to the glory of Champagne, it may be said that this affection is amply justified. Provins, one of the most charming spots in France, rivals Frangistan and the valley of Cashmere; not only has it all the poetry of Saadi, the Homer of Persia, but it also has pharmaceutical treasures for medical science. The crusaders brought roses from Jericho to this delightful valley, where, by some chance, the flowers developed new qualities without losing anything of their colour. And Provins is not only the Persia of France; it might be Baden, Aix, Bath; it has mineral waters.

This is the picture seen year after year, which now and again appeared in a vision to the haberdashers on the muddy pavement of the Rue Saint-Denis.

After crossing the grey flats that lie between la Ferté-Gaucher and Provins—a desert, but a fertile one, a desert of wheat—you mount a hill. Suddenly, at your

feet, you see a town watered by two rivers; at the bottom of the slope spreads a green valley broken by graceful lines and retreating distances. If you come from Paris you take Provins lengthways; you see the everlasting French highroad running along the foot of the hill and close under it, owning its blind man and its beggars, who throw in an accompaniment of lamentable voices when you pause to gaze at this unexpectedly picturesque tract of land. If you arrive from Troyes, you come in from the plain. The castle and the old town, with its rampart, climb the shelves of the hill. The new town lies below.

There are upper and lower Provins; above, a town in the air, with steep streets and fine points of view, surrounded by hollow roads like ravines between rows of walnut-trees, furrowing the narrow hilltop with deep cuttings: a silent town this, clean and solemn, overshadowed by the imposing ruins of the stronghold; then, below, a town of mills, watered by the Voulzie and the Durtain, two rivers of Brie, narrow, sluggish, and deep; a town of inns and trade, of retired tradespeople, traversed by diligences, chaises, and heavy carts. These two towns—or this town—with its historical associations, with the melancholy of its ruins, the gaiety of its valley, its delightful ravines full of unkempt hedgerows and wildflowers, its river terraced with gardens, has so sure a hold on the love of its children that they behave like the sons of Auvergne, of Savoy, of France. Though they leave Provins to seek their fortune, they always come back to it. The phrase, 'To die in one's burrow,' made for rabbits and faithful souls, might be taken by the natives of Provins as their motto.

And so the two Rogrons thought only of their beloved Provins. As he sold thread, the brother saw the old town. While packing cards covered with buttons, he was gazing at the valley. He rolled and unrolled tape, but he was following the gleaming course of the

rivers. As he looked at his pigeon-holes he was climbing the sunk roads whither of old he fled to evade his father's rage, to eat walnuts, and to cram on blackberries. The little Square at Provins above all filled his thoughts; he would beautify the house; he dreamed of the front he would rebuild, the bedrooms, the sitting-room, the billiard-room, the dining-room; then of the kitchen garden, which he would turn into an English garden with a lawn, grottoes, fountains, statues, and what not?

The rooms in which the brother and sister slept on the second floor of the house, three windows wide and six stories high—there are many such in the Rue Saint-Denis—had no furniture beyond what was strictly necessary; but not a soul in Paris had finer furniture than this haberdasher. As he walked in the streets he would stand in the attitude of an ecstatic, looking at the handsome pieces on show, and examining hangings with which he filled his house. On coming home he would say to his sister, 'I saw a thing in such or such a shop that would just do for us!' The next day he would buy another, and invariably he gave up one month the choice of the month before. The revenue would not have paid for his architectural projects; he wanted everything, and always gave the preference to the newest thing. When he studied the balconies of a newly built house, and the doubtful attempts at exterior decoration, he thought the mouldings, sculpture, and ornament quite out of place. 'Ah!' he would say to himself, 'those fine things would look much better at Provins than they do there.' As he digested his breakfast on his doorstep, leaning his back against the shop side, with a hazy eye the haberdasher saw a fantastic dwelling, golden in the sunshine of his dream; he walked in a garden, listening to his fountain as it splashed in a shower of diamonds on a round flag of limestone. He played billiards on his own table; he planted flowers.

When his sister sat, pen in hand, lost in thought, and

forgetting to scold the shopmen, she was seeing herself receiving the townsfolk of Provins, gazing at herself in the tall mirrors of her drawing-room, and wearing astounding caps. Both brother and sister were beginning to think that the atmosphere of the Rue Saint-Denis was unwholesome, and the smell of the mud in the market made them long for the scent of the roses of Provins. They suffered alike from home-sickness and monomania, both thwarted by the necessity for selling their last remnants of thread, reels of silk, and buttons. The promised land of the valley of Provins attracted these Israelites all the more strongly because they had for a long time really suffered, and had crossed with gasping breath the sandy deserts of haberdashery.

The letter from the Lorrains arrived in the middle of a meditation on that beautiful future. The haberdashers scarcely knew their cousin Pierrette Lorrain. The settlement of Auffray's estate, long since, by the old innkeeper, had taken place when they were going into business, and Rogron never said much about his money matters. Having been sent to Paris so young, the brother and sister could hardly remember their aunt Lorrain. It took them an hour of genealogical discussion to recall their aunt, the daughter of their grandfather Auffray's second wife, and their mother's half-sister. They then remembered that Madame Lorrain's mother was the Madame Néraud who had died of grief. They concluded that their grandfather's second marriage had been a disastrous thing for them, the result being the division of Auffray's estate between two families. They had, indeed, heard sundry recriminations from their father, who was always somewhat of the grudging publican. The pair studied the Lorrains' letter through the medium of these reminiscences, which were not in Pierrette's favour. To take charge of an orphan, a girl, a cousin, who in any case would be their heiress in the event of their neither of them marrying,—this was

matter for discussion. The question was regarded from every point of view. In the first place, they had never seen Pierrette. Then it would be very troublesome to have a young girl to look after. Would they not be binding themselves to provide for her? It would be impossible to send her away if they did not like her. Would they not have to find her a husband? And if, after all, Rogron could find 'a shoe to fit him' among the heiresses of Provins, would it not be better to keep all they had for his children? The shoe that would fit her brother, according to Sylvie, was a rich girl, stupid and ugly, who would allow her sister-in-law to rule her. The couple decided that they would refuse.

Sylvie undertook to reply. Business was sufficiently pressing to retard this letter, which she did not deem urgent, and indeed the old maid thought no more about it when the forewoman consented to buy the business and stock-in-trade of the *Sœur de famille.*

Sylvie Rogron and her brother had gone to settle in Provins four years before the time when Brigaut's appearance brought so much interest into Pierrette's life. But the doings of these two persons in the country require a description no less than their life in Paris; for Provins was fated to be as evil an influence for Pierrette as her cousins' commercial antecedents.

When a small tradesman who has come to Paris from the provinces returns to the country from Paris, he inevitably brings with him some notions; presently he loses them in the habits of the place where he settles down, and where his fancies for innovations gradually sink. Hence come those slow, small, successive changes which are gradually scratched by Paris on the surface of country-town life, and which are the essential stamp of the change of a retired shopkeeper into a confirmed provincial. This change is a real distemper. No small tradesman can pass without a shock from perpetual talk to utter silence, from the activity of his Paris life to the stagna-

tion of the country. When the good folks have earned a little money, they spend a certain amount on the passion they have so long been hatching, and work off the last spasms of an energy which cannot be stopped short at will. Those who have never cherished any definite plan, travel, or throw themselves into the political interests of the municipality. Some go out shooting or fishing, and worry their farmers and tenants. Some turn usurers, like old father Rogron, or speculate, like many obscure persons.

The dream of this brother and sister is known to you; they wanted to indulge their magnificent fancy for handling the trowel, for building a delightful house. This fixed idea had graced the Square of lower Provins with the frontage which Brigaut had just been examining, the interior arrangements of the house, and its luxurious furniture. The builder drove never a nail in without consulting the Rogrons, without making them sign the plans and estimates, without explaining in lengthy detail the structure of the object under discussion, where it was made, and the various prices. As to anything unusual, it had always been introduced by Monsieur Tiphaine or Madame Julliard the younger, or Monsieur Garceland, the Maire. Such a resemblance with some wealthy citizen of Provins always carried the day in the builder's favour.

'Oh, if Monsieur Garceland has got one we will have it!' said Mademoiselle Sylvie. 'It must be right; he had good taste.'

'Sylvie, he suggests we should have ovolos in the cornice of the passage.'

'You call that an ovolo?'

'Yes, Mademoiselle.'

'But why? What a queer name! I never heard it before.'

'But you have seen them?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know Latin?'

'No.'

'Well, it means egg-shaped; the ovolo is egg-shaped.'

'You are a queer crew, you architects!' cried Rogron. 'That, no doubt, is the reason you charge so much; you don't throw away your egg-shells!'

'Shall we paint the passage?' asked the builder.

'Certainly not!' cried Sylvie. 'Another five hundred francs!'

'But the drawing-room and the stairs are so nice, it is a pity not to decorate the passage,' said the builder. 'Little Madame Lesourd had hers painted last year.'

'And yet her husband, being crown prosecutor, cannot stay at Provins——'

'Oh! he will be President of the Courts here some day,' said the builder.

'And what do you think is to become of Monsieur Tiphaine then?'

'Monsieur Tiphaine! He has a pretty wife; I am not uneasy about him. Monsieur Tiphaine will go to Paris.'

'Shall we paint the corridor?'

'Yes; the Lesourds will, at any rate, see that we are as good as they are,' said Rogron.

The first year of their residence in Provins was wholly given up to these discussions, to the pleasure of seeing the workmen busy, to the surprises and information of all kinds that they got by it, and to the attempts made by the brother and sister to scrape acquaintance with the most important families in the town.

The Rogrons had never had any kind of society; they had never gone out of their shop; they knew literally no one in Paris, and they thirsted for the pleasures of visiting. On their return they found first Monsieur and Madame Julliard, of the *Ver chinois*, with their children and grand-children; then the Guépin family, or, to be exact, the Guépin clan; the grandson still kept the shop of the *Trois Quenouilles*; and finally, Madame

Guénée, who had sold them the business of the *Sœur de famille*; her three daughters were married in Provins. These three great tribes—the Julliards, the Guépins, and the Guénées—spread over the town like couch-grass on a lawn. Monsieur Garceland, the Maire, was Monsieur Guépin's son-in-law. The Curé, Monsieur l'Abbé Péroux, was own brother to Madame Julliard, who was a Péroux. The President of the Court, Monsieur Tiphaine, was brother to Madame Guénée, who signed herself '*née* Tiphaine.'

The queen of the town was Madame Tiphaine *junior*, the handsome only daughter of Madame Roguin, who was the wealthy wife of a notary of Paris; but he was never mentioned. Delicate, pretty, and clever, married to a provincial husband by the express management of her mother, who would not have her with her, and had taken her from school only a few days before her marriage, Mélanie felt herself an exile at Provins, where she behaved admirably well. She was already rich, and had great expectations. As to Monsieur Tiphaine, his old father had advanced his eldest daughter, Madame Guénée, so much money on account of her share of the property, that an estate worth eight thousand francs a year, at about five leagues from Provins, would fall to the President. Thus the Tiphaines, who had married on twenty thousand francs a year, exclusive of the President's salary and residence, expected some day to have twenty thousand francs a year more. They were not out of luck, people said.

Madame Tiphaine's great and only object in life was to secure her husband's election as deputy. Once in Paris, the deputy would be made judge, and from the Lower Court she promised herself he should soon be promoted to the High Court of Justice. Hence she humoured everybody's vanity, and strove to please; more difficult still, she succeeded. The young woman of two-and-twenty received twice a week, in her handsome house in the old

town, all the citizen class of Provins. She had not yet taken a single awkward step on the slippery ground where she stood. She gratified every conceit, patted every hobby; grave with serious folks, and a girl with girls, of all things a mother with the mothers, cheerful with the young wives, eager to oblige, polite to all; in short, a pearl, a gem, the pride of Provins. She had not yet said the word, but all the electors of the town awaited the day when their dear President should be old enough, to nominate him at once. Every voter, sure of his talents, made him his man and his patron. Oh yes, Monsieur Tiphaine would get on; he would be Keeper of the Seals, and he would promote the interests of Provins.

These were the means by which Madame Tiphaine had been so fortunate as to obtain her ascendency over the little town of Provins. Madame Guénée, Monsieur Tiphaine's sister, after seeing her three daughters married —the eldest to Monsieur Lesourd the public prosecutor, the second to Monsieur Martener the doctor, and the third to Monsieur Auffray the notary—had herself married again Monsieur Galardon, the collector of taxes. Mesdames Lesourd, Martener, and Auffray, and their mother Madame Galardon, regarded the President as the wealthiest and cleverest man in the family. The public prosecutor, Monsieur Tiphaine's nephew by marriage, had the greatest interest in getting his uncle to Paris, so as to be made President himself. Hence these four ladies—for Madame Galardon adored her brother—formed a little court about Madame Tiphaine, taking her opinion and advice on every subject.

Then Monsieur Julliard's eldest son, married to the only daughter of a rich farmer, was taken with a sudden passion, a *grande passion*, secret and disinterested, for the President's wife—that angel dropped from the sky of Paris. Mélanie, very wily, incapable of burthening herself with a Julliard, but perfectly capable of keeping him as an Amadis and making use of his folly, advised him

to start a newspaper to which she was the Egeria. So for two years now Julliard, animated by his romantic passion, had managed a paper and run a diligence for Provins. The newspaper, entitled *La Ruche*, *The Beehive*, included literary, archæological, and medical papers concocted in the family. The advertisements of the district paid the expenses; the subscriptions—about two hundred—were all profit. Melancholy verses sometimes appeared in it, unintelligible to the country people, and addressed 'To Her!!!' with the three points of admiration. Thus the young Julliard couple, singing the merits of Madame Tiphaine, had allied the clan Julliard to that of the Guénées. Thenceforward the President's drawing-room, of course, led the society of the town. The very few aristocrats who lived at Provins met in a single house in the old town, that of the old Comtesse de Bréautey.

During the first six months after their transplanting, the Rogrons, by favour of their old-time connection with the Julliards, the Guépins, and the Guénées, and by emphasising their relationship to Monsieur Auffray the notary—a great grand-nephew of their grandfather's—were received at first by Madame Julliard the elder and Madame Galardon; then, not without difficulty, they found admission to the beautiful Madame Tiphaine's drawing-room. Everybody wished to know something about the Rogrons before inviting them to call. It was a little difficult to avoid receiving tradespeople of the Rue Saint-Denis, natives of Provins, who had come back to spend their money there. Nevertheless, the instinct of society is always to bring together persons of similar fortune, education, manners, acquaintance, and character. Now the Guépins, the Guénées, and the Julliards were of a higher grade, and of older family, than the Rogrons—the children of a money-lending innkeeper who could not be held blameless in his private life, nor with regard to

the Auffray inheritance. Auffray the notary, Madame Galardon's son-in-law, knew all about it; the estate had been wound up in his predecessor's office. Those older merchants, who had retired twelve years since, had found themselves on the level of education, breeding, and manners of the circle to which Madame Tiphaine imparted a certain stamp of elegance, of Paris varnish. Everything was homogeneous; they all understood each other, and knew how to conduct themselves, and talk so as to be agreeable to the rest. They knew each other's characters, and were accustomed to agree. Having been once received by Monsieur Garceland the Maire, the Rogrons flattered themselves that they should soon be on intimate terms with the best society of the town. Sylvie learnt to play boston. Rogron, far too stupid to play any game, twirled his thumbs and swallowed his words when once he had talked about his house. But the words acted like medicine; they seemed to torture him cruelly; he rose, he looked as if he were about to speak; he took fright and sat down again, his lips comically convulsed. Sylvie unconsciously displayed her nature at games. Fractious and complaining whenever she lost, insolently triumphant when she won, contentious and fretful, she irritated her adversaries and her partners, and was a nuisance to everybody.

Eaten up with silly and undisguised envy, Rogron and his sister tried to play a part in a town where a dozen families had formed a net of close meshes; all their interests, all their vanities made, as it were, a slippery floor on which new-comers had to tread very cautiously to avoid running up against something or getting a fall. Allowing that the rebuilding of their house might cost thirty thousand francs, the brother and sister between them would still have ten thousand francs a year. They fancied themselves very rich, bored their acquaintance to death with their talk of future splendour, and so gave the measure of their meanness, their crass ignorance, and

their idiotic jealousy. The evening they were introduced to Madame Tiphaine the beauty—who had already watched them at Madame Garceland's, at her sister-in-law's, Madame Galardon's, and at the elder Madame Julliard's—the queen of Provins said in a confidential tone to Julliard *junior*, who remained alone with her and the President a few minutes after every one was gone—

'You all seem to be much smitten with these Rogrons?'

'I!' said the Amadis of Provins; 'they bore my mother; they overpower my wife; and when Mademoiselle Sylvie was sent, thirty years ago, as an apprentice to my father, even then he could not endure her.'

'But I have a very great mind,' said the pretty lady, putting a little foot on the bar of the fender, 'to give them to understand that my drawing-room is not an inn-parlour.'

Julliard cast up his eyes to the ceiling as much as to say—

'Dear Heaven, what wit, what subtlety!'

'I wish my company to be select, and if I admit the Rogrons it will certainly not be that.'

'They have no heart, no brain, no manners,' said the President. 'When after having sold thread for twenty years, as my sister did, for instance——'

'My dear, your sister would not be out of place in any drawing-room,' said Madame Tiphaine, in a parenthesis.

'If people are so stupid as to remain haberdashers to the end,' the President went on; 'if they do not cast their skin; if they think that "Comtes de Champagne" means "accounts for wine," as the Rogrons did this evening, they should stay at home.'

'They are noisome!' said Julliard. 'You might think there was only one house in Provins. They want to crush us, and, after all, they have hardly enough to live on.'

'If it were only the brother,' said Madame Tiphaine, 'we might put up with him. He is not offensive. Give him a Chinese puzzle, and he would sit quietly in a corner. It would take him the whole winter to put up one pattern. But Mademoiselle Sylvie! What a voice—like a hyena with a cold! What lobster's claws! Do not repeat anything of this, Julliard.'

When Julliard was gone, the little lady said to her husband—

'My dear, there are enough of the natives that I am obliged to receive; these two more would be the death of me; and with your permission, we will deprive ourselves of the pleasure.'

'You are the mistress in your own house,' said the President, 'but we shall make many enemies. The Rogrons will join the Opposition, which hitherto has had no solidity in Provins. That Rogron is already hanging on to Baron Gouraud and Vinet the lawyer.'

'Heh!' said Mélanie, with a smile, 'they will do you service then. Where there are no enemies, there is no triumph. A Liberal conspiracy, an illegal society, a fight of some kind, would bring you into the foreground.'

The President looked at his young wife with a sort of alarmed admiration.

Next day every one at Madame Garceland's said in every one else's ear that the Rogrons had not had a success at Madame Tiphaine's, and her remark about the inn-parlour was much applauded. Madame Tiphaine took a month before returning Mademoiselle Sylvie's visit. This rudeness is much remarked on in the country. Then, at Madame Tiphaine's, when playing boston with the elder Madame Julliard, Sylvie made a most unpleasant scene about a splendid *misère* hand, on which her erewhile mistress caused her to lose—maliciously and on purpose, she declared. Sylvie, who loved to play nasty tricks on others, could never accept a return

in kind. Madame Tiphaine, therefore, set the example of making up the card-parties before the Rogrons arrived, so that Sylvie was reduced to wandering from table to table, watching others play, while they looked at her askance with meaning glances. At old Madame Julliard's, whist was now the game, and Sylvie could not play it. The old maid at last understood that she was an outlaw, but without understanding the reason. She believed herself to be an object of jealousy to everybody.

Ere long the Rogrons were asked nowhere; but they persistently spent their evenings at various houses. Clever people made game of them, without venom, quite mildly, leading them to talk utter nonsense about the *ovolos* in their house, and about a certain cellaret for liqueurs, matchless in Provins. Meanwhile they gave themselves the final blow. Of course, they gave a few sumptuous dinners, as much in return for the civilities they had received as to show off their splendour. The guests came solely out of curiosity. The first dinner was given to Monsieur and Madame Tiphaine, with whom the Rogrons had not once dined; to Messieurs and Mesdames Julliard, father and son, mother and daughter-in-law; to Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur the Curé, Monsieur and Madame Galardon. It was one of those provincial spreads, where the guests sit at table from five o'clock till nine. Madame Tiphaine had introduced the grand Paris style to Provins, the well-bred guests going away as soon as coffee had been served. She had some friends that evening at home, and tried to steal away, but the Rogrons escorted the couple to the very street; and when they returned, bewildered at having failed to keep the President and his wife, the other guests explained Madame Tiphaine's good taste, and imitated it with a promptitude that was cruel in a country-town.

'They will not see our drawing-room lighted up!' cried Sylvie, 'and candle-light is like rouge to it.'

The Rogrons had hoped to give their guests a

surprise. No one hitherto had been admitted to see this much-talked-of house. And all the frequenters of Madame Tiphaine's drawing-room impatiently awaited her verdict as to the marvels of the '*Palais* Rogron.'

'Well,' said little Madame Martener, 'you have seen the Louvre? Tell us all about it.'

'But all—like the dinner—will not amount to much.'

'What is it like?'

'Well, the front door, of which we were, of course, required to admire the gilt-iron window frames that you all know, opens into a long passage through the house, dividing it unequally, since there is but one window to the street on the right, and two on the left. At the garden end this passage has a glass door to steps leading down to the lawn, a lawn with a decorative pedestal supporting a plaster cast of the Spartacus, painted to imitate bronze. Behind the kitchen the architect has contrived a little pantry under the staircase, which we were not spared seeing. The stair, painted throughout like yellow-veined marble, is a hollow spiral, just like the stairs that in a café lead from the ground floor to the entresol. This trumpery structure of walnut wood, really dangerously light, and with banisters picked out with brass, was displayed to us as one of the seven new wonders of the world. The way to the cellars is beneath.

'On the other side of the passage, looking on the street, is the dining-room, opening by folding doors into the drawing-room, of the same size, but looking on to the garden.'

'So there is no hall?' said Madame Auffray.

'The hall, no doubt, is the long passage where you stand in a draught,' replied Madame Tiphaine. 'We have had the eminently national, liberal, constitutional, and patriotic notion,' she went on, 'of making use only of wood grown in France! In the dining-room, the floor, laid in a neat pattern, is of walnut wood. The

sideboards, table, and chairs are also in walnut. The window curtains are of white cotton with red borders, looped back with vulgar ropes over enormous pegs with elaborate dull-gilt rosettes, the mushroom-like object standing out against a reddish paper. These magnificent curtains run on rods ending in huge scrolls, and are held up by lions' claws in stamped brass, one at the top of each pleat.

'Over one of the sideboards is a regular café clock, draped, as it were, with a sort of napkin in bronze gilt, an idea that quite enchants the Rogrons. They tried to make me admire this device; and I could find nothing better to say than that if it could ever be proper to hang a napkin round a clock face, it was, no doubt, in a dining-room. On this sideboard are two large lamps, like those which grace the counters of grand restaurants. Over the other is a highly decorative barometer, which seems to play an important part in their existence; Rogron gazes at it as he might gaze at his bride-elect. Between the windows the builder has placed a white earthenware stove in a hideously ornate niche. The walls blaze with a splendid paper in red and gold, such as you will see in these same restaurants, and Rogron chose it there no doubt on the spot.

'Dinner was served in a set of white-and-gold china; the dessert service is bright blue with green sprigs; but they opened the china closet to show us that they had another service of stoneware for everyday use. The linen is in large cupboards facing the sideboards. Everything is varnished, shining, new, and harsh in colour. Still, I could accept the dining-room; it has a character of its own which, though not pleasing, is fairly representative of that of the owners; but there is no enduring the five engravings—those black-and-white things against which the Minister of the Interior ought really to get a decree; they represent Poniatowski leaping into the Elster, the Defence of the Barrière de Clichy, Napoleon him-

self pointing a gun, and two prints of Mazeppa, all in gilt frames of a vulgar pattern suitable to the prints, which are enough to make one loathe popularity. Oh! how much I prefer Madame Julliard's pastels representing fruits, those capital pastels which were done in the time of Louis XV., and which harmonise with the nice old dining-room and its dark, rather worm-eaten panels, which are at least characteristic of the country, and suit the heavy family silver, the antique china, and all our habits. The country is provincial; it becomes ridiculous when it tries to ape Paris. You may perhaps retort, "*Vous êtes orfèvre, Monsieur Josse!*"—"You are to the manner born." But I prefer this old room of my father-in-law Tiphaine's, with its heavy curtains of green-and-white damask, its Louis XV. chimney-piece, its scroll pattern pier glass, its old beaded mirrors and time-honoured card-tables; my jars of old Sèvres, old blue, mounted in old gilding; my clock with its impossible flowers, my out-of-date chandelier, and my tapestried furniture, to all the splendour of their drawing-room.'

'What is it like?' said Monsieur Martener, delighted with the praise of the country so ingeniously brought in by the pretty Parisienne.

'The drawing-room is a fine red—as red as Mademoiselle Sylvie when she is angry at losing a *misère*.'

'Sylvie-red,' said the President, and the word took its place in the vocabulary of the district.

'The window-curtains—red! the furniture—red! the chimney-piece—red marble veined with yellow! the candelabra and clock—red marble veined with yellow, and mounted in a heavy vulgar style; Roman lamp-brackets supported on Greek foliage! From the top of the clock a lion stares down on you, stupidly, as the Rogrons stare; a great good-natured lion, the ornamental lion so called, which will long continue to dethrone real lions; he spends his life clutching a black ball exactly like a deputy of the left. Perhaps it is a Constitutional

allegory. The dial of this clock is an extraordinary piece of work.

'The chimney glass is framed with appliqué ornaments, which look poor and cheap, though they are a novelty. But the upholsterer's genius shines most in a panel of red stuff of which the radiating folds all centre in a rosette in the middle of the chimney-board—a romantic poem composed expressly for the Rogrons, who display it with ecstasy. From the ceiling hangs a chandelier, carefully wrapped in a green cotton shroud, and with reason; it is in the very worst taste, raw-toned bronze, with even more detestable tendrils of brown gold. Under it a round tea-table of marble, with more yellow than ever in the red, displays a shining metal tray, on which glitter cups of painted china—such painting!—arranged round a cut-glass sugar-basin, so bold in style that our grandchildren will open their eyes in amazement at the gilt rings round the edge and the diamond pattern on the sides, like a mediæval quilted doublet, and at the tongs for taking the sugar, which probably no one will ever use.

'This room is papered with red flock-paper imitating velvet, divided into panels by a beading of gilt brass, finished at the corners with enormous palms. A chromolithograph hangs on each panel, framed most elaborately in plaster casting of garlands to imitate fine wood-carving. The furniture of elm-root, upholstered with satin-cloth, classically consists of two sofas, two large easy-chairs, six armchairs, and six light chairs. The console is graced by an alabaster vase, called *à la Medicis*, under a glass shade, and by the much-talked-of liqueur-case. We were told often enough that "there is not such another in Provins." In each window bay, hung with splendid red silk curtains and lace curtains besides, stands a card-table. The carpet is Aubusson; the Rogrons have not failed to get hold of the crimson ground with medallions of flowers, the vulgarest of all the common patterns.

'The room looks uninhabited; there are no books or prints—none of the little things that furnish a table,' and she looked at her own table covered with fashionable trifles, albums, and the pretty toys that were given her. 'There are no flowers, none of the little nothings that fade and are renewed. It is all as cold and dry as Mademoiselle Sylvie. Buffon is right in saying that the style is the man, and certainly drawing-rooms have a style!'

Pretty Madame Tiphaine went on with her description by epigrams; and from this specimen, it is easy to imagine the rooms in which the brother and sister really lived on the first floor, which they also displayed to their guests. Still, no one could conceive of the foolish expenses into which the cunning builder had dragged the Rogrons; the mouldings of the doors, the elaborate inside shutters, the plaster ornaments on the cornices, the fancy painting, the brass-gilt knobs and bells, the ingenious smoke-consuming fireplaces, the contrivances for the prevention of damp, the sham inlaid wood on the staircase, the elaborate glass and smith's work—in short, all the fancy-work which adds to the cost of building, and delights the common mind, had been lavished without stint.

No one would go to the Rogrons' evenings; their pretensions were still-born. There were abundant reasons for refusing; every day was taken up by Madame Garceland, Madame Galardon, the two Julliard ladies, Madame Tiphaine, the Sous-préfet, etc. The Rogrons thought that giving dinners was all that was needed to get into society; they secured some young people who laughed at them, and some diners-out, such as are to be found in every part of the world; but serious people quite gave them up. Sylvie, alarmed at the clear loss of forty thousand francs swallowed up without any return in the house she called her dear house, wanted to recover the sum by economy. So she soon ceased to

give dinners that cost from thirty to forty francs, without the wine, as they failed to realise her hope of forming a circle—a thing as difficult to create in the country as it is in Paris. Sylvie dismissed her cook, and hired a country girl for the coarser work. She herself cooked 'to amuse herself.'

Thus, fourteen months after their return home, the brother and sister had drifted into a life of isolation and idleness. Her banishment from 'the world' had roused in Sylvie's soul an intense hatred of the Tiphaines, Julliards, Auffrays, and Garcelands—in short, of everybody in Provins society, which she stigmatised as a *clique*, with which she was on the most distant terms. She would gladly have set up a rival circle; but the second-rate citizen class was composed entirely of small tradespeople, never free but on Sundays and holidays; or of persons in ill-odour, like Vinet the lawyer and Doctor Néraud; or of rank Bonapartists, like General Gouraud; and Rogron very rashly made friends with these, though the upper set had vainly warned him against them. The brother and sister were obliged to sit together by the fire of their dining-room stove, talking over their business, the faces of their customers, and other equally amusing matters.

The second winter did not come to an end without their being almost crushed by its weight of dulness. They had the greatest difficulty in spending the hours of their day. As they went to bed at night, they thought, 'One more over!' They spun out the morning by getting up late and dressing slowly. Rogron shaved himself every morning; he examined his face and described to his sister the changes he fancied he noted in it; he squabbled with the maid over the temperature of the hot water; he wandered into the garden to see if the flowers were sprouting; he ventured down to the river-bank, where he had built a summer-house; he examined

the woodwork of the house. Had it warped? Had the settling split any of the panels? Was the paint wearing well? Then he came in to discuss his anxieties as to a sick hen, or some spot where the damp had left stains, talking to his sister, who affected hurry in laying the table while she scolded the maid. The barometer was the most useful article in the house to Rogron; he consulted it for no reason, tapped it familiarly like a friend, and then said, 'Vile weather!' to which his sister would reply, 'Pooh, the weather is quite seasonable.' If anybody called, he would boast of the excellence of this instrument.

Their breakfast took up some little time. How slowly did these two beings masticate each mouthful. And their digestion was perfect; they had no cause to fear cancer of the stomach. By reading the *Ruche* and the *Constitutionnel* they got on to noon. They paid a third of the subscription to the Paris paper with Vinet and Colonel Gouraud. Rogron himself carried the paper to the Colonel, who lived in the Square, lodging with Monsieur Martener; the soldier's long stories were an immense delight to him. Rogron could only wonder why the Colonel was considered dangerous. He was such an idiot as to speak to him of the ostracism under which he lived, and retail the sayings of the 'clique.' God only knows what the Colonel—who feared no one, and was as redoubtable with the pistol as with the sword—had to say of 'la Tiphaine' and 'her Julliard,' of the ministerial officials of the upper town—'men brought over by foreigners, capable of anything to stick in their places, cooking the lists of votes at the elections to suit themselves,' and the like.

At about two o'clock Rogron sallied forth for a little walk. He was quite happy when a shopkeeper, standing at his door, stopped him with a 'How d'ye do, Père Rogron?' He gossiped, and asked, 'What news in the town?' heard and repeated scandal, or the tittle-tattle of

Provins. He walked to the upper town, or in the sunk roads, according to the weather. Sometimes he met other old men airing themselves in like manner. Such meetings were happy events.

There were at Provins certain men who were out of conceit with the life of Paris, learned and modest men, living with their books. Imagine Rogron's frame of mind when he listened to a supernumerary judge named Desfondrilles, more of an archæologist than a lawyer, saying to a man of education, old Monsieur Martener, the doctor's father, as he pointed to the valley—

'Will you tell me why the idlers of all Europe flock to Spa rather than to Provins, when the waters of Provins are acknowledged to be superior by the whole French faculty of medicine, and to have effects and an energy worthy of the medical properties of our roses?'

'What do you expect?' replied the man of the world, 'it is one of the caprices of Caprice, and just as inexplicable. The wines of Bordeaux were unknown a hundred years ago. Maréchal Richelieu, one of the grandest figures of the last century, the Alcibiades of France, was made governor of Guyenne. His chest was delicate—the world knew why—the wine of the country strengthened and restored him to health. Bordeaux at once made a hundred millions of francs a year, and the Marshal extended the Bordeaux district as far as Angoulême and as far as Cahors, in short, to forty leagues in every direction! Who knows where the vineyards of Bordeaux end?—And there is no equestrian statue of the Marshal at Bordeaux!'

'Ah! if such an event should take place at Provins in this century or the next,' Monsieur Desfondrilles went on, 'I hope that either on the little Square in the lower town, or on the castle, or somewhere in the upper town, some bas-relief would be seen representing the head of Monsieur Opoix, the rediscoverer of the mineral waters of Provins!'

'But, my dear sir, it would perhaps be impossible to rehabilitate Provins,' said old Monsieur Martener. 'The town is bankrupt.'

At this Rogron opened his eyes wide, and exclaimed—'What!'

'Provins was formerly a capital which, in the twelfth century, held its own as a rival to Paris, when the Counts of Champagne held their court here as King René held his in Provence,' replied the man of learning. 'In those days civilisation, pleasure, poetry, elegance, women—in short, all the splendour of social life was not exclusively restricted to Paris. Towns find it as hard as houses of business to rise again from ruin. Nothing is left to Provins but the fragrance of its historic past and that of its roses—and a sous-préfecture.'

'Oh! to think what France might be if she still had all her feudal capitals!' said Desfondrilles. 'Can our sous-préfets fill the place of the poetic, gallant, and warlike race of Thibault, who made Provins what Ferrara was in Italy, what Weimar was in Germany, and what Munich would like to be in our day?'

'Provins was a capital?' asked Rogron.

'Why, where have you dropped from?' said Desfondrilles the archæologist.

The lawyer struck the pavement of the upper town where they were standing with his stick: 'Do not you know,' he cried, 'that all this part of Provins is built on crypts?'

'Crypts?'

'Yes, to be sure, crypts of unaccountable loftiness and extent. They are like cathedral aisles, full of pillars.'

'Monsieur Desfondrilles is writing a great antiquarian work in which he intends to describe these singular structures,' said old Martener, seeing the lawyer mount his hobby.

Rogron came home enchanted to think that his house stood in this valley. The crypts of Provins kept him

occupied for five or six days in exploring them, and for several evenings afforded a subject of conversation to the old couple. Thus Rogron generally picked up something about old Provins, about the intermarriages of the families, or some stale political news which he retailed to his sister. And a hundred times over in the course of his walk—several times even of the same person—he would ask, 'Well, what is the news? What has happened lately?' When he came in he threw himself on a sofa in the drawing-room as if he were tired out, but really he was only weary of his own weight.

He got on to dinner-time by going twenty times to and fro between the drawing-room and the kitchen, looking at the clock, opening and shutting doors. So long as the brother and sister spent the evenings in other houses they got through the hours till bedtime, but after they were reduced to staying at home the evening was a desert to traverse. Sometimes people on their way home, after spending the evening out, as they crossed the little Place, heard sounds in the Rogrons' house as if the brother were murdering the sister; they recognised them as the terrific yawns of a haberdasher driven to bay. The two machines had nothing to grind with their rusty wheels, so they creaked.

The brother talked of marrying, but with a sense of despair. He felt himself old and worn; a wife terrified him. Sylvie, who understood the need for a third person in the house, then remembered their poor cousin, for whom no one in Provins had ever inquired, for everybody supposed that little Madame Lorrain and her daughter were both dead. Sylvie Rogron never lost anything; she was too thoroughly an old maid to mislay anything, whatever it might be. She affected to have found the letter from the Lorrains so as to make it natural that she should mention Pierrette to her brother, and he was almost happy at the possibility of having a little girl about the house. Sylvie wrote to the old

Lorrains in a half-business-like, half-affectionate tone, attributing the delay in her answer to the winding up of their affairs, to their move back to Provins, and settling there. She affected to be anxious to have her little cousin with her, allowing it to be understood that if Monsieur Rogron should not marry, Pierrette would some day inherit twelve thousand francs a year. It would be needful to have been, like Nebuchadnezzar, to some extent a wild beast, shut up in a cage in a beast-garden with nothing to prey on but butcher's meat brought in by the keeper, or else a retired tradesman with no shop-clerks to nag, to imagine the impatience with which the brother and sister awaited their cousin Lorrain. Three days after the despatch of the letter they were already wondering when the child would arrive.

Sylvie discerned in her so-called generosity to her penniless cousin a means of changing the views of Provins society with regard to herself. She called on Madame Tiphaine, who had stricken them with her disapproval, and who aimed at creating an upper class at Provins, like that at Geneva, and blew the trumpet to announce the advent of her cousin Pierrette, the child of Colonel Lorrain, pitying her woes, and congratulating herself as a lucky woman on having a pretty young heiress to introduce in society.

'You have been a long time discovering her,' remarked Madame Tiphaine, who sat enthroned on a sofa by her fireside.

Madame Garceland, in a few words spoken in an undertone during a deal, revived the story of the Auffray property. The notary related the innkeeper's iniquities.

'Where is the poor little thing?' asked the President politely.

'In Brittany,' said Rogron.

'But Brittany is a wide word!' remarked Monsieur Lesourd, the public prosecutor.

'Her grandfather and grandmother wrote to us.—When was it, my dear?' asked Rogron.

Sylvie, absorbed in asking Madame Garceland where she had bought the stuff for her dress, did not foresee the effect of her answer, and said, 'Before we sold our business.'

'And you answered three days ago, Mademoiselle Sylvie!' exclaimed the notary.

Sylvie turned as red as the hottest coals in the fire.

'We wrote to the Institution of Saint-Jacques,' replied Rogron.

'There is a sort of asylum there for old people,' said a lawyer, who had been supernumerary judge at Nantes. 'But she cannot be there, for they only take in persons who are past sixty.'

'She is there with her grandmother Lorrain,' said Rogron.

'She had a little money, the eight thousand francs left her by your father—no, I mean your grandfather,' said the notary, blundering intentionally.

'Indeed!' said Rogron, looking stupid, and not understanding this sarcasm.

'Then you knew nothing of your first cousin's fortune or position?' asked the President.

'If Monsieur Rogron had known it, he would not have left her in a place which is no more than a respectable workhouse,' said the judge severely. 'I remember now that a house belonging to Monsieur and Madame Lorrain was sold at Nantes under an execution; and Mademoiselle Lorrain lost her claims, for I was the commissioner in charge.'

The notary spoke of Colonel Lorrain, who, if he were alive, would indeed be astonished to think of his child being in an institution like that of Saint-Jacques. The Rogrons presently withdrew, thinking the world very spiteful. Sylvie perceived that her news had had no success; she had ruined herself in everybody's opinion; henceforth

she had no hope of making her way in the higher society of Provins.

From that day the Rogrons no longer dissembled their hatred of the great citizen-families of Provins, and of all their adherents. The brother now repeated all the Liberal fables which Lawyer Vinet and Colonel Gouraud had crammed him with about the Tiphaines, the Guénées, the Garcelands, the Guépins, and the Julliards.

'I tell you what, Sylvie, I don't see why Madame Tiphaine should turn a cold shoulder on the Rue Saint-Denis: the best of her beauty was made there. Madame Roguin, her mother, is a cousin of the Guillaumes of the *Cat and Racket*, who gave over their business to their son-in-law Joseph Lebas. Her father is that notary, that Roguin, who failed in 1819, and ruined the Birotteaus. So Madame Tiphaine's money is stolen wealth; for what is a notary's wife who takes her own settlement out of the fire and allows her husband to become a fraudulent bankrupt? A pretty thing indeed! Ah! I understand! She got her daughter married to live here at Provins through her connection with the banker du Tillet. And these people are proud!—Well! However, that is what the world is!'

On the day when Denis Rogron and his sister Sylvie thus broke out in abuse of the clique, they had, without knowing it, become persons of importance, and were on the high road to having some society; their drawing-room was on the point of becoming a centre of interests which only needed a stage. The retired haberdasher assumed historical and political dignity, for, still without knowing it, he gave strength and unity to the hitherto unstable elements of the Liberal party at Provins. And this was the way of it: The early career of the Rogrons had been anxiously observed by Colonel Gouraud and the advocate Vinet, who had been thrown together by their isolation and their agreement of ideas. These two men professed equal patriotism, and for the same reasons

—they wanted to acquire importance. But though they were anxious to be leaders, they lacked followers. The Liberals of Provins comprised an old soldier who sold lemonade; an innkeeper; Monsieur Cournant, a notary, Monsieur Auffray's rival; Monsieur Néraud, a physician, Doctor Martener's rival; and some independent persons, farmers scattered about the neighbourhood, and holders of national stock. The Colonel and the lawyer, glad to attract an idiot whose money might help them in their manœuvres, who would support their subscriptions, who, in some cases, would take the bull by the horns, and whose house would be useful as a town-hall for the party, took advantage of the Rogrons' hostility towards the aristocrats of the place. The Colonel, the lawyer, and Rogron had a slight bond in their joint subscription to the *Constitutionnel*; it would not be difficult for the Colonel to make a Liberal of the ex-haberdasher, though Rogron knew so little of political history that he had not heard of the exploits of Sergeant Mercier; he thought he was a friend and brother.

The impending arrival of Pierrette hastened the hatching of certain covetous dreams to which the ignorance and folly of the old bachelor and old maid had given rise. The Colonel, seeing that Sylvie had lost all chance of getting her foot into the circle of the Tiphaines, had an idea. Old soldiers have seen so many horrors in so many lands, so many naked corpses grimacing hideously on so many battle-fields, that an ugly face has no terrors for them, so the Colonel took steady aim at the old maid's fortune. This officer, a short, fat man, wore rings in his ears, which were already graced by bushy tufts of hair. His floating grey whiskers were such as in 1799 had been called 'fins.' His large, good-natured, red face was somewhat frost-bitten, as were those of all who escaped at the Beresina. His huge, prominent stomach had the flattened angle below characteristic of an old cavalry officer; Gouraud had

commanded the second regiment of Hussars. His grey moustache covered a huge mouth—a perfect trap—the only word to describe that abyss; he did not eat, he devoured! A sword-cut had shortened his nose. His speech was in consequence thick and deeply nasal, like that ascribed to Capuchin friars. His hands, which were small, short, and broad, were such as make a woman say, 'You have the hands of a thorough scamp.' His legs, below such a huge body, looked frail. Within this active but clumsy body lay a cunning spirit, entire experience of life and things, hidden under the apparent carelessness of a soldier, and utter contempt for the conventionalities of society. Colonel Gouraud had the pension of the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and two thousand four hundred francs a year as half-pay—a thousand crowns a year in all for his whole income.

The lawyer, tall and lean, had no talent but his political opinions, and no income but the meagre profits of his business. At Provins solicitors plead their own cases. In view of his opinions, the Court listened with small favour to Maître Vinet; and the most Liberal farmers, when entangled in lawsuits, would rely on an attorney in favour with the Bench rather than employ Vinet. This man was said to have led astray a rich girl living near Coulommiers, and to have compelled her parents to let her marry him. His wife was one of the Chargebœufs, an old family of nobles in la Brie, who took their name from the exploit of a squire in Saint Louis' expedition to Egypt. She had incurred her parents' displeasure, and they, to Vinet's knowledge, had arranged to leave their whole fortune to their eldest son, charged, no doubt, with a reversion in favour of his sister's children. Thus this man's first ambitious scheme came to nothing. The lawyer, soon haunted by poverty, and ashamed of not having enough to enable his wife to keep up appearances, had made vain efforts to get his foot into a ministerial career; but the rich branch of the

Chargebœufs refused to assist him. These Royalists, were strictly moral, and disapproved of a compulsory marriage; besides, their would-be relation's name was Vinet; how could they favour any one so common? So the lawyer was handed on from one branch to another when he tried to utilise his wife's interest with her relations. Madame Vinet found no assistance but from one of the family, a widowed Madame Chargebœuf, with a daughter, quite poor, who lived at Troyes. And a day came when Vinet remembered the kind reception his wife met with from this lady.

Rejected by the whole world, full of hatred of his wife's family, of the Government which refused him an appointment, and of the society of Provins, which would have nothing to say to him, Vinet accepted his poverty. His venom fermented and gave him energy to endure. He became a Liberal on perceiving that his fortune was bound up with the triumph of the Opposition, and vegetated in a wretched little house in the upper town, which his wife seldom quitted. This girl, born to a better fate, lived absolutely alone in her home with her one child. There are cases of poverty nobly met and cheerfully endured; but Vinet, eaten up by ambition, and feeling that he had wronged a young creature, cherished a dark indignation; his conscience expanded to admit every means to success. His face, still young, changed for the worse. People were sometimes terrified in Court at the sight of his flat viperine head, with its wide mouth, and eyes that glittered through his spectacles; at hearing his sharp, shrill, rasping voice, that wrung their nerves. His muddy complexion, patchy with sickly hues of yellow and green, revealed his suppressed ambitions, his perpetual mortifications and hidden penury. He could argue and harangue; he had no lack of point and imagery; he was learned and crafty. Accustomed to indulge his imagination for the sake of rising by hook or by crook, he might have made a politician. A man

who hesitates at nothing so long as it is legal is a strong man, and in this lay Vinet's strength.

This coming athlete of parliamentary debate—one of the men who were to proclaim the supremacy of the House of Orleans—had a disastrous influence over Pierrette's fate. At present he wanted to provide himself with a weapon by founding a newspaper at Provins. After having studied the Rogrons from afar, with the assistance of the Colonel, he ended by reckoning on the brother. And this time he reckoned with his host; his poverty was to come to an end after seven dolorous years, during which more than one day had come round without bread. On the day when Gouraud announced to Vinet, on the little Square, that the Rogrons had broken with the citizen aristocracy and official circles of the old town, the lawyer nudged him significantly in the ribs.

'This wife or that, ugly or handsome, it must be all the same to you,' said he. 'You should marry Mademoiselle Rogron, and then we could get something done here——'

'I was thinking of it. But they have sent for the daughter of poor Colonel Lorrain—their heiress,' said Gouraud.

'You could make them leave you their money by will. You would have a very nicely fitted house.'

'And the child, after all! Well, we shall see,' said the Colonel, with a jocose and deeply villainous leer, which showed a man of Vinet's temper how small a thing a little girl was in the eyes of this old soldier.

Since her grandparents had gone into the asylum where they were forlornly ending their days, Pierrette, young and full of pride, was so dreadfully miserable at living there on charity, that she was happy to learn that she had some rich connections. On hearing that she was leaving, Brigaut, the Major's son, the companion of

her childhood, who was now a joiner's apprentice at Nantes, came to give her the money needful for her journey by coach—sixty francs, all the savings of his odd earnings painfully hoarded; Pierrette accepted it with the sublime indifference of true friendship, showing that she, in similar circumstances, would have been hurt by thanks. Brigaut had gone every Sunday to Saint-Jacques to play with Pierrette, and to comfort her. The sturdy young workman had already gone through his delightful apprenticeship to the perfect and devoted care that we give to the object of our involuntary choice and affection. More than once ere now, Pierrette and he, on a Sunday, sitting in a corner of the garden, had sketched their childish dreams on the veil of the future; the young craftsman, mounted on his plane, travelled round the world, making a fortune for Pierrette, who waited for him.

So, in the month of October 1824, when Pierrette had almost completed her eleventh year, she was placed in the care of the guard of the diligence from Nantes to Paris by the two old people and the young apprentice, all three dreadfully sad. The guard was requested to put her into the coach for Provins, and to take great care of her. Poor Brigaut! he ran after the diligence like a dog, looking at his dear Pierrette as long as he could. In spite of the child's signals, he ran on for a league beyond the town, and when he was exhausted, his eyes sent a last tearful glance at Pierrette, who cried when she could see him no more. Pierrette put her head out of the window, and discerned her friend standing squarely, and watching the heavy vehicle that left him behind.

The Lorrains and Brigaut had so little knowledge of life that the little Bretonne had not a sou left when she arrived in Paris. The guard, to whom the child prattled of rich relations, paid her expenses at an inn in Paris, made the guard of the Troyes coach repay him, and

desired him to deliver Pierrette to her family and collect the debt, exactly as if she were a parcel by carrier.

Four days after leaving Nantes, at about nine o'clock one Monday evening, a kind, burly old guard of the Messageries Royales took Pierrette by the hand, and, while the coach was unloading in the High Street such passengers and parcels as were to be deposited at Provins, he led her, with no luggage but two frocks, two pairs of stockings, and two shifts, to the house pointed out to him by the office clerk as that of Mademoiselle Rogron.

'Good morning, Mademoiselle, and gents all,' said the guard. 'I have brought you a cousin of yours, and here she be, and a pretty dear too. You have forty-seven francs to pay. Though your little girl has no weight of baggage, please to sign my way-book.'

Mademoiselle Sylvie and her brother gave way to their delight and astonishment.

'Begging your pardon,' said the guard, 'my coach is waiting—sign my sheet and give me forty-seven francs and sixty centimes, and what you please for me and the guard from Nantes, for we have taken as much care of her as if she were our own. We have paid out for her bed and food, her place in the coach here, and other little things.'

'Forty-seven francs and twelve sous?' exclaimed Sylvie.

'You're never going to beat me down?' cried the guard.

'But where is the invoice?' said Rogron.

'The invoice!—Here is my way-bill.'

'You can talk afterwards, pay now!' said Sylvie to her brother; 'you see, you cannot help paying.'

Rogron went to fetch forty-seven francs twelve sous.

'And nothing for us—for my pal and me?' said the guard.

Sylvie produced a two-franc piece from the depths of her old velvet bag, where her keys lurked in bunches.

V Beuchee

'Thank you—keep it,' said the man. 'We would rather have looked after the little girl for her own sake.' He took up his sheet and went out, saying to the servant girl: 'A nice place this is! There are crocodiles of that sort without going to Egypt for 'em.'

'Those people are horribly coarse!' said Sylvie, who had heard his speech.

'Dame! they took care of the child,' replied Adèle, with her hands on her hips.

'We are not obliged to live with him,' said Rogron.

'Where is she to sleep?' asked the maid.

Such was the reception that met Pierrette Lorrain on her arrival at her cousins' house, while they looked at her with a bewildered air. She was flung on their hands like a parcel, with no transition between the wretched room in which she had lived with her grandparents and her cousins' dining-room, which struck her as palatial. She stood there mute and shy. To any one but these retired haberdashers, the little Bretonne would have been adorable in her frock of coarse blue serge, a pink cotton apron, her blue stockings, thick shoes, and white kerchief; her little red hands were covered by knitted mittens of red wool edged with white that the guard had bought for her. Her little Brittany cap, which had been washed in Paris—it had got tumbled in the course of the journey from Nantes—really looked like a glory round her bright face. This native cap, made of fine cambric, with a stiff lace border ironed into flat pleats, deserves a description, it is so smart and so simple. The light, filtered through the muslin and lace, casts a half shadow, a twilight softness, on the face; it gives it the virginal grace which painters try to find on their palettes, and which Léopold Robert has succeeded in lending to the Raphael-like face of the woman holding a child in his picture of the *Reapers*. Within this setting of broken lights shone an artless rose and white face, beaming with vigorous health. The heat of the room

brought the blood to her head, and it suffused the edge of her tiny ears with fire, tinging her lips and the tip of a finely cut nose, while by contrast it made her bright complexion look whiter than before.

'Well, have you nothing to say to us?' said Sylvie. 'I am your cousin Sylvie, and that is your cousin Denis.'

'Are you hungry?' asked Rogron.

'When did you leave Nantes?' asked Sylvie.

'She is dumb,' said Rogron.

'Poor child, she has very few clothes to her back!' observed sturdy Adèle, as she untied the bundle wrapped in a handkerchief belonging to old Lorrain.

'Kiss your cousin,' said Sylvie. Pierrette kissed Rogron.

'Yes, kiss your cousin,' said Rogron. Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

'She is scared by the journey, poor little thing; perhaps she is sleepy,' said Adèle.

Pierrette felt a sudden and invincible aversion for her two relations, a feeling she had never before known. Sylvie and the maid went to put the little girl to bed in the room on the second floor where Brigaut was to see the cotton curtain. There were in this attic a small bed with a pole painted blue, from which hung a cotton curtain, a chest of drawers of walnut wood, with no marble top, a smaller table of the same wood, a looking-glass, a common bed-table, and three wretched chairs. The walls and sloping roof to the front were covered with a cheap blue paper flowered with black. The floor was painted and waxed, and struck cold to the feet. There was no carpet but a thin bedside rug made of selvages. The chimney-shelf, of cheap marble, was graced with a mirror, two candlesticks of copper gilt, and a vulgar alabaster vase with two pigeons drinking to serve as handles; this Sylvie had had in her room in Paris.

'Shall you be comfortable here, child?' asked Sylvie.

'Oh! it is beautiful!' replied the little girl in her silvery treble.

'She is not hard to please,' muttered the sturdy peasant woman to herself. 'I had better warm the bed, I suppose?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Sylvie, 'the sheets may be damp.'

Adèle brought a head kerchief of her own when she came up with the warming-pan; and Pierrette, who had hitherto slept in sheets of coarse Brittany linen, was amazed at the fine, soft cotton sheets. When the little girl was settled and in bed, Adèle, as she went downstairs, could not help exclaiming, 'All her things put together are not worth three francs, Mademoiselle!'

Since adopting her system of strict economy, Sylvie always made the servant sit in the dining-room, so as to have but one lamp and one fire. When Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, Adèle withdrew to her kitchen. Pierrette's arrival kept them talking for the rest of the evening.

'We must get her some clothes to-morrow,' said Sylvie. 'She has hardly a stitch.'

'She has no shoes but those thick ones she had on, and they weigh a pound,' said Adèle.

'They wear them so in those parts,' said Rogron.

'How she looked at the room, which is none so fine neither, for a cousin of yours, Mademoiselle!'

'So much the better; hold your tongue. You see she is delighted with it.'

'Lord above us! what shifts! They must rub her skin raw. But none of these things are of any use,' said Adèle, turning out the contents of Pierrette's bundle.

Till ten o'clock master, mistress, and maid were busy deciding of what stuff and at what price the shifts should be made, how many pairs of stockings and of what quality, and how many under-petticoats would be needed, and calculating the cost of Pierrette's wardrobe.

'You will not get off for less than three hundred

francs,' said Rogron to his sister, as he carried the price of each article in his head from long practice, and added up the total from memory.

'Three hundred francs!' exclaimed Sylvie.

'Yes, three hundred; work it out yourself.'

The brother and sister began again, and made it three hundred francs without the sewing.

'Three hundred francs at one cast of the net!' cried Sylvie, who went to bed on the idea so ingeniously expressed by this proverbial figure of speech.

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love has blessed with tenderness, cheerfulness, brightness, generosity, and devotedness; nothing had as yet chilled or crushed her heart; it was almost wildly sensitive, and the way she was received by her relations weighed on it painfully. Though Brittany had to her been a home of poverty, it had also been a home of affection. Though the old Lorrains were the most unskilful traders, they were the simplest, most loving, most caressing souls in the world, as all disinterested people are. At Pen-Hoël their little grand-daughter had had no teaching but that of nature. Pierrette went as she would in a boat on the pools, she ran about the village or the fields with her companion Jacques Brigaut, exactly like Paul and Virginia. Both the children, spoiled and petted by every one, and as free as the air, ran after the thousand joys of childhood; in summer they went to watch the fishermen, they caught insects, plucked flowers, and gardened; in winter they made slides, built smart snow-palaces and snow-men, or made snowballs to pelt each other. They were everywhere welcome; everybody smiled on them.

When it was time that they should learn something, misfortunes came. Jacques, left destitute by his father's death, was apprenticed by his relations to a cabinet-maker, and maintained by charity, as Pierrette was soon after in the asylum of Saint-Jacques. But even in this

almshouse, pretty little Pierrette had been made much of, loved, and kindly treated by all. The child, thus accustomed to so much affection, no longer found, in the home of these longed-for and wealthy relations, the look, the tone, the words, the manner which she had hitherto met with in every one, even in the guards of the diligences. Thus her amazement, already great, was complicated by the changed moral atmosphere into which she had been plunged. The heart can turn suddenly cold and hot as the body can. The poor child longed to cry without knowing what for. She was tired, and she fell asleep.

Accustomed to rise very early, like all country-bred children, Pierrette awoke next morning two hours before the cook. She dressed, trotted about her room over her cousin's head, looked out on the little Square, and was going downstairs; she was astonished at the splendour of the staircase; she examined every detail—the rosettes, the brass-work, the mouldings, the painting, etc. Then she went down; she could not open the garden door, so she came up again; went down once more when Adèle was about, and sprang into the garden. She took possession of it, ran to the river, was amazed by the summer-house, went into the summer-house; she had enough to see and wonder at in all she saw till her cousin Sylvie was up. During breakfast Sylvie said to her—

'So it was you, little bird, who were trotting up and downstairs at daybreak, and making such a noise? You woke me so completely that I could not get to sleep again. You must be very quiet, very good, and learn to play without making a sound. Your cousin does not like noise?'

'And you must take care about your feet,' said Rogron. 'You went into the summer-house with muddy shoes, and left your footsteps printed on the floor. Your cousin likes everything to be clean. A great girl like you ought to be cleanly. Were you not taught to be

clean in Brittany? To be sure, when I went there to buy flax it was dreadful to see what savages they were! —She has a fine appetite at any rate,' said Rogron, turning to his sister; 'you might think she had not seen food these three days.'

And so, from the very first, Pierrette felt hurt by her cousins' remarks, hurt without knowing why. Her frank and upright nature, hitherto left to itself, had never been used to reflect; incapable, therefore, of understanding wherein her cousins were wrong, she was doomed to tardy enlightenment through suffering.

After breakfast, the couple, delighted by Pierrette's astonishment, and eager to enjoy it, showed her their fine drawing-room, to teach her to respect its splendour. Unmarried people, as a result of their isolation, and prompted by the craving for something to interest them, are led to supply the place of natural affections by artificial affections—the love of dogs, cats, or canary birds, of their servant or their spiritual director. Thus Rogron and Sylvie had an immoderate affection for the house and furniture that had cost them so much. Sylvie had taken to helping Adèle every morning, being of opinion that the woman did not know how to wipe furniture, to brush it, and make it look like new. This cleaning was soon her constant occupation. Thus, far from diminishing in value, the furniture was improved. Then the problem was to use it without wearing it out, without staining it, without scratching the wood or chilling the polish. This idea ere long became an old maid's monomania. Sylvie kept in a closet woollen rags, wax, varnish, and brushes; she learnt to use them as skilfully as a polisher; she had feather brooms and dusters, and she could rub without fear of hurting herself, she was so strong! Her clear, blue eye, as cold and hard as steel, constantly peered under the furniture, and you were more likely to find a tender chord in her heart than a speck of flue under a chair.

After what had passed at Madame Tiphaine's, Sylvie could not possibly shirk the outlay of three hundred francs. During the first week Sylvie was wholly occupied, and Pierrette constantly amused, by the frocks to be ordered and tried on, the shifts and petticoats to be cut out and made by needlewomen working by the day. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

'She has been nicely brought up!' cried Rogron. 'Do you know nothing, child?'

Pierrette, who only knew how to love, answered but by a pretty childish shrug.

'What did you do all day in Brittany?' asked Rogron.

'I played,' she replied guilelessly. 'Everybody played with me. Grandmamma and grandpapa—and everybody told me stories. Oh! they were very fond of me.'

'Indeed!' replied Rogron, 'and so you lived like a lady.'

Pierrette did not understand this tradesman's wit. She opened her eyes wide.

'She is as stupid as a wooden stool,' said Sylvie to Mademoiselle Borain, the best workwoman in Provins.

'So young!' said the needlewoman, looking at Pierrette, whose delicate little face looked up at her with a knowing expression.

Pierrette liked the workwomen better than her cousins; she put on pretty airs for them, watched them sewing, said quaint things—the flowers of childhood, such as Rogron and Sylvie had already silenced by fear, for they liked to impress all dependants with a wholesome alarm. The sewing-women were charmed with Pierrette. The outfit, however, was not achieved without some terrible interjections.

'That child will cost us the eyes in our heads!' said Sylvie to Rogron.

'Hold yourself up child, do. The deuce is in it! the clothes are for you, not for me,' said she to Pierrette, when she was being measured or fitted.

'Come, let Mademoiselle Borain do her work; you

won't pay her day's wages!' she exclaimed, seeing the child ask the head needlewoman to do something for her.

'Mademoiselle,' asked Mademoiselle Borain, 'must this seam be back-stitched?'

'Yes; make everything strongly; I do not want to have such a piece of work again in a hurry.'

But it was the same with the little cousin as with the house. Pierrette was to be as well dressed as Madame Garceland's little girl. She had fashionable little boots of bronze kid, like the little Tiphaine girl. She had very fine cotton stockings, stays by the best maker, a frock of blue reps, a pretty cape lined with white silk, all in rivalry with young Madame Julliard's little girl. And the underclothes were as good as the outside show, Sylvie was so much afraid of the keen and scrutinising eye of the mothers of children. Pierrette had pretty shifts of fine calico. Mademoiselle Borain said that Madame the Sous-préfète's little girls wore cambric drawers with embroidery and frilling—the latest thing, in short; Pierrette had frilled drawers. A charming drawn bonnet was ordered for her of blue velvet lined with white satin, like the little Martener girl's. Thus Pierrette was the smartest little person in Provins. On Sunday, on coming out from church, all the ladies kissed her. Mesdames Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Auffray, Lesourd, Martener, Guépin, and Julliard doted on the sweet little Bretonne. This excitement flattered old Sylvie's vanity, and in her lavishness she thought less of Pierrette than of gratified pride.

However, Sylvie was fated to find offence in her little cousin's success, and this was how it came about: Pierrette was asked out, and, still to triumph over her neighbours, Sylvie allowed her to go. Pierrette was called for to play games and have dolls' dinner-parties with these ladies' children. Pierrette was a much greater success than the Rogrons; Mademoiselle Sylvie was aggrieved that Pierrette was in demand at other houses,

but that no one came to see Pierrette at home. The artless child made no secret of her enjoyment at the houses of the Tiphaines, the Marteners, the Galardons, the Julliards, the Lesourds, the Auffrays, and the Garcelands, whose kindness contrasted strangely with the vexatiousness of her cousins. A mother would have been glad of her child's happiness; but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette to please themselves, not to please her; their feelings, far from being paternal, were tainted with egoism and a sort of commercial interest.

The beautiful outfit, the fine Sunday clothes, and the everyday frocks began Pierrette's misfortunes. Like all children free to amuse themselves and accustomed to follow the dictates of fancy, she wore out her shoes, boots, and frocks with frightful rapidity, and, above all, her frilled drawers. A mother when she scolds her child thinks of the child only; she is only hard when driven to extremities, and when the child is in the wrong; but in this great clothes question, the cousins' money was the first consideration; that was the real point, and not Pierrette. Children have a dog-like instinct for discerning injustice in those who rule them; they feel without fail whether they are tolerated or loved. Innocent hearts are more alive to shades than to contrasts; a child that does not yet understand evil knows when you offend the sense of beauty bestowed on it by nature. The lessons that Pierrette brought upon herself as to the behaviour of a well-bred young lady, as to modesty and economy, were the corollary of this main idea—'Pierrette is ruining us.'

These scoldings, which had a fatal issue for Pierrette, led the old couple back into the familiar commercial ruts from which their home-life at Provins had led them to wander, and in which their nature could expand and blossom. After being used to domineer, to make remarks, to give orders, to scold their clerks sharply, Rogron and his sister were perishing for lack of victims.

Small natures require despotism to exercise their sinews, as great souls thirst for equality to give play to their heart. Now narrow minds can develop as well through persecution as through benevolence; they can assure themselves of their power by tyrannising cruelly or beneficently over others; they go the way their nature guides them. Add to this the guidance of interest, and you will have the key to most social riddles. Pierrette now became very necessary to her cousins' existence. Since her arrival the Rogrons had been absorbed in her outfit, and then attracted by the novelty of companionship. Every new thing, a feeling, or even a tyranny, must form its set, its creases. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette 'my child'; she gave up 'my child' for 'Pierrette' unqualified. Her reproofs, at first sourly gentle, became hard and sharp. As soon as they had started on this road, the brother and sister made rapid progress. They were no longer dull. It was not a deliberate scheme of malice and cruelty; it was the instinct of unreasoning tyranny. They believed that they were doing good to Pierrette, as of old to their apprentices.

Pierrette, whose sensitiveness was genuine, noble, and overstrung, the very antipodes of the Rogrons' aridity, had a horror of being blamed; it struck her so cruelly that tears rose at once to her large, clear eyes. She had a hard struggle to suppress her engaging liveliness, which charmed every one out of the house. She might indulge it before the mothers of her little friends; but at home, by the end of the first month, she began to sit silent, and Rogron asked her if she were ill. At this strange question she flew off to the bottom of the garden to cry by the river, into which her tears fell, as she was one day to fall in the torrent of society.

One day, in spite of her care, the little girl tore her best reps frock at Madame Tiphaine's, where she had gone to play one fine day. She at once burst into tears, foreseeing the scolding that awaited her at home. On

being questioned, she let fall a few words about her terrible cousin Sylvie in the midst of her tears. Pretty Madame Tiphaine had some stuff to match, and she herself put in a new front breadth. Mademoiselle Rogron heard of the trick, as she called it, played on her by that limb of a little girl. From that day she would never let Pierrette visit any of the ladies.

The new life which Pierrette was to lead at Provins was fated to fall into three very distinct phases. The first lasted three months, during which she enjoyed a kind of happiness, divided between the old people's cold caresses, and the scoldings, which she found scorching. The prohibition that kept her from seeing her little friends, emphasising the necessity for beginning to learn everything that a well-brought-up girl should know, put an end to the first phase of Pierrette's life at Provins, the only period when she found existence endurable.

The domestic changes produced at the Rogrons' house by Pierrette's residence there were studied by Vinet and the Colonel with the cunning of a fox bent on getting into a fowl-house, and uneasy at discovering a new creature on the scene. They both paid calls at long intervals, so as not to scare Mademoiselle Sylvie; they found various excuses for chatting with Rogron, and made themselves masters of the situation with an air of reserve and dignity that the great Tartufe might have admired. The Colonel and the lawyer spent at the Rogrons the evening of the very day when Sylvie had refused, in very harsh terms, to let Pierrette go to Madame Tiphaine's. On hearing of her refusal, the Colonel and the lawyer looked at each other as folks who knew their Provins.

'She positively tried to make a fool of you?' said the lawyer. 'We warned Rogron long ago of what has now happened. There is no good to be got out of those people.'

'What can you expect of the Anti-national Party?' cried the Colonel, curling up his moustache and interrupting Vinet. 'If we had tried to get you away from them, you might have thought that we had some malicious motive for speaking to you so. But why, Mademoiselle, if you are fond of a little game, should you not play boston in the evenings at home in your own house? Is it impossible to find any one in the place of such idiots as the Julliards? Vinet and I play boston; we will find a fourth. Vinet might introduce his wife to you; she is very nice, and she is one of the Chargebœufs. You will not be like those apes in the upper town; you will not expect a good little housewife, who is compelled by her family's disgraceful conduct to do all her own house-work, to dress like a duchess,—and she has the courage of a lion and the gentleness of a lamb.'

Sylvie Rogron displayed her long yellow teeth in a smile at the Colonel, who endured the horrible phenomenon very well, and even assumed a flattering air.

'If there are but four of us, we cannot play boston every evening,' replied she.

'Why, where else have I to go—an old soldier like me who has nothing to do, and lives on his pensions? The lawyer is free every evening. Besides, you will have company, I promise you,' he added, with a mysterious air.

'You have only to declare yourselves frankly opposed to the Ministerial party in Provins, and hold your own against them,' said Vinet. 'You would see how popular you would be in Provins; you would have a great many people on your side. You would make the Tiphaines furious by having an Opposition salon. Well, then, let us laugh at others, if others laugh at us. The "clique" do not spare you, I can tell you.'

'What do they say?' asked Sylvie.

In country towns there is always more than one safety-

valve by which gossip finds a vent from one set into another. Vinet had heard all that had been said about the Rogrons in the drawing-rooms from which the haberdashers had been definitively banished. The supernumerary judge Desfondrilles, the archæologist, was of neither party. This man, like some other independent members of society, repeated everything he heard, out of provincial habit, and Vinet had had the benefit of his chit-chat. The malicious lawyer repeated Madame Tiphaine's pleasantries with added venom. As he revealed the practical jokes of which Sylvie and Rogron had been the unconscious victims, he stirred the rage and aroused the revengeful spirit of these two arid souls, craving some aliment for their mean passions.

A few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred woman, shy, neither plain nor pretty, very meek, and very conscious of her misfortune. Madame Vinet was fair, rather worn by the cares of her penurious housekeeping, and very simply dressed. No woman could have better pleased Sylvie. Madame Vinet put up with Sylvie's airs, and gave way to her like a woman accustomed to give way. On her round forehead, her rose-pink cheeks, in her slow, gentle eyes, there were traces of those deep reflections, that clear-sighted thoughtfulness, which women who are used to suffering bury under perfect silence. The influence of the Colonel, displaying for Sylvie's behoof *courtieresque* graces that seemed wrung from his soldierly roughness, with that of the wily Vinet, soon made itself felt by Pierrette. The child, the pretty squirrel, shut up in the house, or going out only with old Sylvie, was every instant checked by a 'Don't touch that, Pierrette!' and by incessant sermons on holding herself up. Pierrette stooped and held her shoulders high; her cousin wanted her to be as straight as herself, and she was like a soldier presenting arms to his Colonel; she would sometimes give her little slaps on her back to make her hold herself up. The free and

light-hearted child of the Marais learnt to measure her movements and imitate an automaton.

One evening, which marked the beginning of the second period, Pierrette, whom the three visitors had not seen in the drawing-room during the evening, came to kiss her cousins and curtsey to the company before going to bed. Sylvie coldly offered her cheek to the pretty little thing, as if to be kissed and have done with it. The action was so cruelly significant that tears started from Pierrette's eyes.

'Have you pricked yourself, my little Pierrette,' said the abominable Vinet.

'What is the matter with you?' asked Sylvie severely.

'Nothing,' said the poor child, going to kiss Rogron.

'Nothing?' repeated Sylvie. 'You cannot be crying for nothing!'

'What is it, my little pet?' said Madame Vinet.

'My rich cousin Sylvie does not treat me so well as my poor grandmother!'

'Your grandmother stole your money,' said Sylvie, 'and your cousin will leave you hers.'

The Colonel and Vinet exchanged covert glances.

'I would rather be robbed and loved,' said Pierrette.

'Very well, you shall be sent back to the place you came from.'

'But what has the dear child done?' asked Madame Vinet.

Vinet fixed his eye on his wife, with that terrible cold, fixed stare that belongs to those who rule despotically. The poor lonely woman, unceasingly punished for not having the one thing required of her—namely, a fortune—took up her cards again.

'What has she done?' cried Sylvie, raising her head with a jerk so sudden, that the yellow wallflowers in her cap were shaken. 'She does not know what to do next to annoy us. She opened my watch to examine the works, and touched the wheel, and broke the mainspring.

Madam listens to nothing. All day long I am telling her to take care what she is about, and I might as well talk to the lamp.'

Pierrette, ashamed of being reprimanded in the presence of strangers, went out of the room very gently.

'I cannot think how to quell that child's turbulence,' said Rogron.

'Why, she is old enough to go to school,' said Madame Vinet.

Another look from Vinet silenced his wife, to whom he had been careful not to confide his plans and the Colonel's with regard to the bachelor couple.

'That is what comes of taking charge of other people's children,' cried Gouraud. 'You might have some of your own yet, you or your brother; why do you not both marry?'

Sylvie looked very sweetly at the Colonel; for the first time in her life she beheld a man to whom the idea that she might marry did not seem absurd.

'Madame Vinet is right!' cried Rogron, 'that would keep Pierrette quiet. A master would not cost much.'

The Colonel's speech so entirely occupied Sylvie that she did not answer her brother.

'If only you would stand the money for the Opposition paper we were talking about, you might find a tutor for your little cousin in the responsible editor. We could get that poor schoolmaster who was victimised by the encroachments of the priests. My wife is right; Pierrette is a rough diamond that needs polishing,' said Vinet to Rogron.

'I fancied that you were a Baron,' said Sylvie to the Colonel, after a long pause, while each player seemed meditative.

'Yes. But having won the title in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, where my regiment did wonders, how could I find the money or the assistance needed to get it duly registered? The barony, like the rank of general,

which I won in 1815, must wait for a revolution to secure them to me.'

'If you could give a mortgage as your guarantee for the money,' said Rogron presently, 'I could do it.'

'That could be arranged with Cournant,' replied Vinet. 'The newspaper would lead to the Colonel's triumph, and make your drawing-room more powerful than those of Tiphaine and Co.'

'How is that?' asked Sylvie.

At this moment, while Madame Vinet was dealing, and the lawyer explaining all the importance that the publication of an independent paper for the district of Provins must confer on Rogron, the Colonel, and himself, Pierrette was bathed in tears. Her heart and brain were agreed; she thought Sylvie far more to blame than herself. The little Bretonne instinctively perceived how unfailing charity and benevolence should be. She hated her fine frocks and all that was done for her. She paid too dear for these benefits. She cried with rage at having given her cousins a hold over her, and determined to behave in such a way as to reduce them to silence, poor child! Then she saw how noble Brigaut had been to give her his savings. She thought her woes had reached a climax, not knowing that at that moment new misfortunes were being plotted in the drawing-room.

A few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was to learn to read, write, and do sums. Pierrette's education involved the house of Rogron in fearful disaster. There was ink on the tables, on the furniture, and on her clothes; writing-books and pens strewn everywhere, powder on the upholstery, books torn and dogs-eared while she was learning her lessons. They already spoke to her—and in what a way!—of the necessity for earning her living and being a burthen on no one. As she heard these dreadful warnings, Pierrette felt a burning in her throat; she was choking, her heart beat painfully fast. She was obliged to swallow down her tears; for

each one was reckoned with as an offence against her magnanimous relations. Rogron had found the occupation that suited him. He scolded Pierrette as he had formerly scolded his shopmen; he would fetch her in from the midst of her play to compel her to study; he heard her repeat her lessons; he was the poor child's fierce tutor. Sylvie, on her part, thought it her duty to teach Pierrette the little she knew of womanly accomplishments.

Neither Rogron nor his sister had any gentleness of nature. These narrow souls, finding a real pleasure in bullying the poor little thing, changed unconsciously from mildness to the greatest severity. This severity was, they said, the consequence of the child's obstinacy; she had begun too late to learn, and was dull of apprehension. Her teachers did not understand the art of giving lessons in a form suited to the pupil's intelligence, which is what should distinguish private from public education. The fault lay far less with Pierrette than with her cousins. It took her an immensely long time to learn the beginnings. For the merest trifle she was called stupid and silly, foolish and awkward. Incessantly ill used by hard words, Pierrette never met any but cold looks from the two old people. She fell into the stolid dulness of a sheep; she dared do nothing when she found her actions misjudged, misunderstood, misinterpreted. In everything she awaited Sylvie's orders, and the expression of her cousin's will, keeping her thoughts to herself and shutting herself up in passive obedience. Her bright colour began to fade. Sometimes she complained of aches and pains. When Sylvie asked her, Where? the poor child, who felt generally ailing, replied, 'All over.'

'Was ever such a thing heard of as aching all over? If you were ill all over, you would be dead!' retorted Sylvie.

'You may have a pain in your chest,' said Rogron the expositor, 'or in your teeth, or your head, or your feet,

or your stomach, but no one ever had pains everywhere. What do you mean by 'all over'? Pain all over is pain nowhere. Do you know what you are doing? You are talking for talking's sake.'

Pierrette at last never spoke, finding that her artless girlish remarks, the flowers of her opening mind, were met with commonplace retorts which her good sense told her were ridiculous.

'You are always complaining, and you eat like a fasting friar!' said Rogron.

The only person who never distressed this sweet fragile flower was the sturdy servant Adèle. Adèle always warmed the little girl's bed, but in secret, since one evening when, being discovered in the act of thus 'spoiling' her master's heiress, she was scolded by Sylvie.

'Children must be hardened; that is the way to give them strong constitutions. Have we been any the worse for it, my brother and I?' said Sylvie. 'You will make Pierrette a peeky coddle!'—*une picheline*, a word of the Rogron vocabulary to designate weakly and complaining persons.

The little angel's caressing expressions were regarded as mere acting. The roses of affection that budded so fresh and lovely in this young soul, and longed to open to the day, were mercilessly crushed. Pierrette felt the hardest blows on the tenderest spots of her heart. If she tried to soften these two savage natures by her pretty ways, she was accused of expressing her tenderness out of self-interest. 'Tell me plainly what you want,' Rogron would exclaim roughly; 'you are certainly not coaxing me for nothing.'

Neither the sister nor the brother recognised affection, and Pierrette was all affection.

Colonel Gouraud, anxious to please Mademoiselle Rogron, declared her right in all that concerned Pierrette. Vinet no less supported the old cousins in their abuse of Pierrette; he ascribed all the reported misdeeds of

this angel to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and said that no power, no strength of will, could ever conquer it. Rogron and his sister were flattered with the utmost skill by these two courtiers, who had at last succeeded in extracting from Rogron the surety money for the newspaper, the *Provins Courrier*, and from Sylvie five thousand francs, as a shareholder. The Colonel and Vinet now took the field. They disposed of a hundred shares at five hundred francs each to the electors who held State securities, and whom the Liberal journals filled with alarms, to farmers, and to persons who were called independent. They even extended their ramifications over the whole department, and beyond it, to some adjacent townships. Each shareholder subscribed for the paper, of course. Then the legal and other advertisements were divided between the *Ruche* and the *Courrier*. The first number contained a grandiloquent column in praise of Rogron, who was represented as the Laffitte of Provins.

As soon as the public mind found a leader, it became easy to perceive that the coming elections would be hotly contested. Madame Tiphaine was in despair.

'Unfortunately,' said she, as she read an article attacking her and Monsieur Julliard, 'unfortunately, I forgot that there is always a rogue not far away from a dupe, and that folly always attracts a clever man of the fox species.'

As soon as the newspaper was to be seen for twenty leagues round, Vinet had a new coat and boots, and a decent waistcoat and trousers. He displayed the famous white hat affected by Liberals, and showed his collar and cuffs. His wife engaged a servant, and appeared dressed as became the wife of an influential man; she wore pretty caps.

Vinet, out of self-interest, was grateful. He and his friend Cournant, notary to the Liberal side, and Auffray's opponent, became the Rogrons' advisers, and did them

two great services. The leases granted by old Rogron their father, in 1815, under unfortunate circumstances, were about to fall in. Horticulture and market-gardening had lately developed enormously in the Provins district. The pleader and the notary made it their business to effect an increase of fourteen hundred francs a year on granting the new leases. Vinet also won for them two lawsuits against two villages, relating to plantations of trees, in which the loss of five hundred poplars was involved. The money for the poplars, with the Rogrons' savings, which for the last three years had amounted to six thousand francs deposited at compound interest, was skilfully laid out in the purchase of several plots of land. Finally, Vinet proposed and carried out the eviction of certain peasant proprietors, to whom Rogron the elder had lent money, and who had killed themselves with cultivating and manuring their land to enable them to repay it, but in vain.

Thus the damage done to the Rogrons' capital by the reconstruction of their house was to a great extent remedied. Their estates in the immediate neighbourhood of the town, chosen by their father as innkeepers know how to choose, cut up into small holdings of which the largest was less than five acres, and let to perfectly solvent tenants, themselves owners of some plots of land mortgaged to secure the farm rents, brought in at Martinmas, in November 1826, five thousand francs. The taxes were paid by the tenants, and there were no buildings to repair or insure against fire.

The brother and sister each possessed four thousand six hundred francs in the five per cents.; and as their selling value was above par, Vinet exhorted them to invest the money in land, promising them—seconded by the notary—that they should not lose a farthing of interest by the transfer.

By the end of this second period life was so intolerable

to Pierrette—the indifference of all about her, the senseless fault-finding and lack of affection in her cousins became so virulent, she felt so plainly the cold chill of the tomb blowing upon her, that she entertained the daring project of going away, on foot, with no money, to Brittany to rejoin her grandfather and grandmother. Two events prevented this: Old Lorrain died, and Rogron was appointed Pierrette's guardian by a family council held at Provins. If her old grandmother had died first, it is probable that Rogron, advised by Vinet, would have called upon the grandfather to repay the child's eight thousand francs, and have reduced him to beggary.

'Why, you may inherit Pierrette's money,' said Vinet with a hideous smile. 'You never can tell who will live or who will die.'

Enlightened by this speech, Rogron left the widow Lorrain no peace as Pierrette's debtor till he had made her secure to the little girl the capital of the eight thousand francs by a deed of gift, of which he paid the cost.

Pierrette was strangely affected by this loss. Just as the blow fell on her she was to be prepared for her first Communion, the other event which by its obligations tied her to Provins. This necessary and simple ceremony was to bring about great changes for the Rogrons. Sylvie learnt that the curé, Monsieur Péroux, was instructing the little Julliards, the Lesourds, Garcelands, and others. She made it therefore a point of honour to put Pierrette under the guidance of the Abbé Péroux's superior, Monsieur Habert, a man who was said to belong to the Jesuit Congregation—very zealous for the interests of the Church, much dreaded in Provins, and hiding immense ambition under the strictest severity of principle. This priest's sister, an unmarried woman of about thirty, had a school for girls in the town. The brother and sister were much alike; both lean, sallow, atrabilious, with black hair.

Pierrette, a Bretonne nurtured in the practice and poetry of the Catholic faith, opened her heart and ears to the teaching of this imposing priest. Suffering predisposes the mind to devoutness; and most young girls, prompted by instinctive tenderness, lean towards mysticism, the obscurer side of religion. So the priest sowed the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church in good ground. He completely changed Pierrette's frame of mind. Pierrette loved Jesus Christ as presented to girls in the Sacrament, as a celestial bridegroom; her moral and physical sufferings now had their meaning; she was taught to see the hand of God in everything. Her soul, so cruelly stricken in this house, while she could not accuse her cousins, took refuge in the sphere whither fly all who are wretched, borne on the wings of the three Christian virtues. She gave up the idea of flight. Sylvie, amazed at the alteration produced in Pierrette by Monsieur Habert, became curious. And so, while preparing the child for her first Communion, Monsieur Habert won to God the hitherto wandering soul of Mademoiselle Sylvie. Sylvie became a bigot.

Denis Rogron, over whom the supposed Jesuit could get no hold—for at that time the spirit of his late lamented Majesty Constitution the First was in some simpletons supreme above that of the Church—Denis remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet, and Liberalism.

Mademoiselle Rogron, of course, made acquaintance with Mademoiselle Habert, with whom she was in perfect sympathy. The two old maids loved each other like two loving sisters. Mademoiselle Habert proposed to take Pierrette under her care, and spare Sylvie the trouble and vexations of educating a child; but the brother and sister replied that Pierrette's absence would make the house feel too empty. The Rogrons' attachment to their little cousin seemed excessive.

On seeing Mademoiselle Habert in possession, Colonel

Gouraud and Vinet ascribed to the ambitious priest, on his sister's behalf, the matrimonial scheme imagined by the Colonel.

'Your sister wants to see you married,' said the lawyer to the ex-haberdasher.

'And to whom?' said Rogron.

'To that old sibyl of a schoolmistress,' cried the Colonel, curling his moustache.

'She has said nothing to me about it,' said Rogron blankly.

A woman so determined as Sylvie was sure to make great progress in the ways of salvation. The priest's influence soon grew in the house, supported as it was by Sylvie, who managed her brother. The two Liberals, very legitimately alarmed, understood that if the priest had determined to get Rogron for his sister's husband—a far more suitable match than that of Sylvie and the Colonel—he would urge Sylvie to the excessive practice of religion, and make Pierrette go into a convent. They would thus lose the reward of eighteen months of efforts, meanness, and flattery. They took a terrible dumb hatred of the priest and his sister, and yet, if they were to keep up with them step for step, they felt the necessity of remaining on good terms with them.

Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert, who played both whist and boston, came every evening. Their assiduity excited that of the others. The lawyer and the soldier felt that they were pitted against adversaries stronger than themselves, a preconception which Monsieur Habert and his sister fully shared. This situation was in itself a battle. Just as the Colonel gave to Sylvie a foretaste of the unhoped-for joys of an offer of marriage—for she had brought herself to regard Gouraud as a man worthy of her—so Mademoiselle Habert wrapped the retired haberdasher in the cotton wool of her attentions, her speeches, and her looks. Neither party could say to itself the great word of great politicians, 'Divide the spoil!' each insisted on the whole prize.

Besides, the two wily foxes of the Opposition at Provins—an Opposition that was growing in strength—were rash enough to believe themselves stronger than the Priesthood; they were the first to fire. Vinet, whose gratitude was stirred up by the claw-fingers of self-interest, went to fetch Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf and her mother. The two women, who had about two thousand francs a year, lived very narrowly at Troyes. Mademoiselle Bathilde de Chargebœuf was one of those splendid women who believe in marrying for love, and change their minds towards their five-and-twentieth year on finding themselves still unwedded. Vinet succeeded in persuading Madame de Chargebœuf to combine her two thousand francs with the thousand crowns he was making now that the newspaper was started, and to come and live with him at Provins, where Bathilde, he said, might marry a simpleton named Rogron, and, so clever as she was, rival handsome Madame Tiphaine.

The reinforcement of Vinet's household and ideas by the arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf gave the utmost cohesion to the Liberal party. This coalition brought consternation to the aristocracy of Provins and the Tiphaine party. Madame de Bréautey, in dismay at seeing two women of family so misled, begged them to come to see her. She bewailed the blunders committed by the Royalists, and was furious with those of Troyes on learning the poverty of this mother and daughter.

'What! was there no old country gentleman who would marry that dear girl, born to rule a château?' cried she. 'They have let her run to seed, and now she will throw herself at the head of a Rogron!'

She hunted the department through, and failed to find one gentleman who would marry a girl whose mother had but two thousand francs a year. Then the 'clique' of the Tiphaines and the Sous-préfet also set to work, but too late, to discover such a man. Madame de

Bréautey inveighed loudly against the selfishness that was eating up France, the result of materialism and of the power conferred on money by the laws; the nobility was nothing in these days! Beauty was nothing! Rogrons and Vinets were defying the King of France!

Bathilde had the indisputable advantage over her rival not merely of beauty, but of dress. She was dazzlingly fair. At five-and-twenty her fully-developed shoulders and splendid modelling were exquisitely full. The roundness of her throat, the slenderness of her articulations, the splendour of her fine fair hair, the charm of her smile, the elegant shape of her head, the dignity and outline of her face, her fine eyes under a well-moulded brow, her calm and well-bred movements, and her still girlish figure, all were in harmony. She had a fine hand and a narrow foot. Her robust health gave her, perhaps, the look of a handsome inn-servant; 'but that should be no fault in a Rogron's eyes,' said pretty Madame Tiphaine.

The first time Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf was seen she was dressed simply enough. Her dress of brown merino, edged with green embroidery, was cut low; but a kerchief of tulle, neatly drawn down by invisible strings, covered her shoulders, back, and bust, a little open at the throat, though fastened by a brooch and chain. Under this fine network Bathilde's beauty was even more attractive, more suggestive. She took off her velvet bonnet and her shawl on entering, and showed pretty ears with gold eardrops. She had a little cross and heart on black velvet round her neck, which contrasted with its whiteness like the black that fantastic nature sets round the tail of a white Angora cat. She was expert in all the arts of girls on their promotion: twisting her fingers to arrange curls that are not out of place, displaying her wrists by begging Rogron to button her cuff, which the hapless man, quite dazzled, bluntly refused to do, hiding his agitation under assumed in-

difference. The bashfulness of the only passion our haberdasher was ever to know in his life always gave it the demeanour of hatred. Sylvie, as well as Céleste Habert, misunderstood it; not so the lawyer, the superior man of this company of simpletons, whose only enemy was the priest, for the Colonel had long been his ally.

Gouraud, on his part, thenceforth behaved to Sylvie as Bathilde did to Rogron. He appeared in clean linen every evening; he wore velvet collars, which gave effect to his martial countenance, set off by the corners of his white shirt collar; he adopted white drill waistcoats, and had a new frockcoat made of blue cloth, on which his red rosette was conspicuous, and all under pretence of doing honour to the fair Bathilde. He never smoked after two o'clock. His grizzled hair was brushed down in a wave over his ochre-coloured skull. In short, he assumed the appearance and attitude of a party chief, of a man who was prepared to rout the enemies of France —in one word, the Bourbons—with tuck of drum.

The Satanical pleader and the cunning Colonel played a still more cruel trick on Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert than that of introducing the beautiful Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf, who was pronounced by the Liberal party and by the Bréauteys to be ten times handsomer than the beautiful Madame Tiphaine. These two great country-town politicians had it rumoured from one to another that Monsieur Habert agreed with them on all points. Provins before long spoke of him as a 'Liberal priest.' Called up before the Bishop, Monsieur Habert was obliged to give up his evenings with the Rogrons, but his sister still went there. Thenceforth the Rogron drawing-room was a fact and a power.

And so, by the middle of that year, political intrigues were not less eager than matrimonial intrigues in the Rogrons' rooms. While covert interests, buried out of sight, were fighting wildly for the upper hand, the public struggle won disastrous notoriety. Everybody

knows that the Villèle ministry was overthrown by the elections of 1826. In the Provins constituency, Vinet, the Liberal candidate—for whom Monsieur Cournant had obtained his qualification by the purchase of some land of which the price remained unpaid—came very near beating Monsieur Tiphaine. The President had a majority of only two.

Mesdames Vinet and de Chargebœuf, Vinet and the Colonel, were sometimes joined by Monsieur Cournant and his wife; then by Néraud the doctor, a man whose youth had been very 'stormy,' but who now took serious views of life; he had devoted himself to science, it was said, and if the Liberals were to be believed, was a far cleverer man than Monsieur Martener. To the Rogrons their triumph was as inexplicable as their ostracism had been.

The handsome Bathilde de Chargebœuf, to whom Vinet spoke of Pierrette as an enemy, was horribly disdainful to the child. The humiliation of this poor victim was necessary to the interest of all. Madame Vinet could do nothing for the little girl who was being brayed in the mortar of the pitiless egotisms which the lady at last understood. But for her husband's imperative desire she would never have come to the Rogrons; it grieved her too much to see their ill-usage of the pretty little thing who clung to her, understanding her secret goodwill, and begged her to teach her such or such a stitch or embroidery pattern. Pierrette had shown that when she was thus treated she understood and succeeded to admiration. But Madame Vinet was no longer of any use, so she came no more.

Sylvie, who still cherished the notion of marriage, now regarded Pierrette as an obstacle. Pierrette was nearly fourteen; her sickly fairness, a symptom that was quite overlooked by the ignorant old maid, made her lovely. Then Sylvie had the bright idea of indemnifying herself for the expenses caused by Pierrette by making

a servant of her. Vinet, as representing the interests of the Chargebœufs, Mademoiselle Habert, Gouraud, all the influential visitors, advised Sylvie by all means to dismiss Adèle. Could not Pierrette cook and keep the house in order? When there was too much to be done, she need only engage the Colonel's housekeeper, a very accomplished person, and one of the best cooks in Provins. Pierrette ought to learn to cook and to polish the floors, said the baleful lawyer, to sweep, keep the house neat, go to market, and know the price of things. The poor little girl, whose unselfishness was as great as her generosity, offered it herself, glad to pay thus for the hard bread she ate under that roof.

Adèle went. Thus Pierrette lost the only person who might perhaps have protected her. Strong as she was, from that hour she was crushed body and soul. The old people had less mercy on her than on a servant: she was their property! She was scolded for mere nothings, for a little dust left on the corner of a chimney-shelf or a glass shade. These objects of luxury that she had so much admired became odious to her. In spite of her anxiety to do right, her relentless cousin Sylvie always found some fault with everything she did. In two years Pierrette never heard a word of praise or of affection. Her whole happiness consisted in not being scolded. She submitted with angelic patience to the dark moods of these two unmarried beings, to whom the gentler feelings were all unknown, and who made her suffer every day from her dependency. This life in which the young girl was gripped, as it were, between the two haberdashers as in the jaws of a vice, increased her malady. She had such violent fits of inexplicable distress, such sudden bursts of secret grief, that her physical development was irremediably checked. And thus, by slow degrees, through terrible though concealed sufferings, Pierrette had come to the state in which the friend of her childhood had seen her as he stood on the little Square and greeted her with his Breton ballad.

Before entering on the story of the domestic drama in the Rogrons' house, to which Brigaut's arrival gave rise, it will be necessary, to avoid digressions, to account for the lad's settling at Provins, since he is in some sort a silent personage on the stage.

Brigaut, as he fled, was alarmed not merely by Pierrette's signal, but also by the change in his little friend; hardly could he recognise her, but for the voice, eyes, and movements which recalled his lively little playfellow, at once so gay and so loving. When he had got far away from the house, his legs quaked under him, his spine felt on fire! He had seen the shadow of Pierrette, and not Pierrette herself. He made his way up to the old town thoughtful and uneasy, till he found a spot whence he could see the Place and the house where Pierrette lived; he gazed at it sadly, lost in thought as infinite as the troubles into which we plunge without knowing where they may end. Pierrette was ill; she was unhappy; she regretted Brittany! What ailed her? All these questions passed again and again through Brigaut's mind, and racked his breast, revealing to him the extent of his affection for his little adopted sister.

It is very rarely that a passion between two children of different sexes remains permanent. The charming romance of Paul and Virginia no more solves the problem of this strange moral fact than does that of Brigaut and Pierrette. Modern history offers the single illustrious exception of the sublime Marchesa di Pescara and her husband, who, destined for each other by their parents at the age of fourteen, adored each other, and were married. Their union gave to the sixteenth century the spectacle of boundless conjugal affection, never clouded. The Marchesa, a widow at four-and-thirty, beautiful, witty, universally beloved, refused monarchs, and buried herself in a convent, where she never saw, never heard, any one but nuns.

Such perfect love as this blossomed suddenly in the

heart of the poor Breton artisan. Pierrette and he had so often been each other's protectors, he had been so happy in giving her the money for her journey, he had almost died of running after the diligence, and Pierrette had not known it! The memory of it had often warmed him during the chill hours of his toilsome life these three years past. He had improved himself for Pierrette; he had learnt his craft for Pierrette; he had come to Paris for Pierrette, intending to make a fortune for her. After being there a fortnight, he could no longer control his longing to see her; he had walked from Saturday evening till Monday morning. He had intended to return to Paris, but the pathetic appearance of his little friend held him fast to Provins. A wonderful magnetism—still disputed, it is true, in spite of so many instances—acted on him without his knowing it; and tears filled his eyes, while they also dimmed Pierrette's sight. If to her he was Brittany and all her happy childhood, to him Pierrette was life! At sixteen Brigaut had not yet learnt to draw or give the section of a moulding; there were many things he did not know; but at piecework he had earned from four to five francs a day. So he could live at Provins; he would be within reach of Pierrette; he would finish learning his business by working under the best cabinetmaker in the town, and watch over the little girl.

Brigaut made up his mind at once. He flew back to Paris, settled his accounts, collected his pass, his luggage, and his tools. Three days later he was working for Monsieur Frappier, the best carpenter in Provins. Energetic workmen, steady, and averse to turbulency and taverns, are rare enough to make a master glad to get a young fellow like Brigaut. To conclude his story on that score, by the end of a fortnight he was foreman, lodging and boarding with Frappier, who taught him arithmetic and linear drawing. The carpenter lived in the High Street, about a hundred yards from the little

oblong Place, at the end of which stood the Rogrons' house.

Brigaut buried his love in his heart, and was not guilty of the smallest indiscretion. He got Madame Frappier to tell him the history of the Rogrons; from her he learnt how the old innkeeper had set to work to get the money left by old Auffray. Brigaut was fully informed as to the character of the haberdasher and his sister. One morning he met Pierrette at market with Mademoiselle Sylvie, and shuddered to see her with a basket on her arm full of provisions. He went to see Pierrette again at church on Sunday, where the girl appeared in all her best; there, for the first time, Brigaut understood that Pierrette was Mademoiselle Lorrain.

Pierrette saw her friend, but she made him a mysterious signal to keep himself out of sight. There was a world of meaning in this gesture, as in that by which, a fortnight since, she had bidden him vanish. What a fortune he would have to make in ten years to enable him to marry the companion of his childhood, to whom the Rogrons would leave a house, a hundred acres of land, and twelve thousand francs a year, not to mention their savings! The persevering Breton would not tempt fortune till he had acquired the knowledge he still lacked. So long as it was theory alone, it was all the same whether he learnt in Paris or at Provins, and he preferred to remain near Pierrette, to whom he also proposed to explain his plans and the sort of help she might count on. Finally, he would certainly not leave her till he understood the secret of the pallor which had already dimmed the life of the feature which generally retains it longest—the eyes; till he knew what caused the sufferings that gave her the look of a girl bowing before the scythe of Death, and about to be cut down.

Her two pathetic signals, which were not false to their friendship, but which enjoined the greatest caution, struck

terror into the lad's heart. Evidently Pierrette desired him to wait, and not to try to see her, or there would be danger and peril for her. As she came out of church she gave him a look, and Brigaut saw that her eyes were full of tears. The Breton would more easily have squared the circle than have guessed what had happened in the Rogrons' house since his arrival.

It was not without lively apprehensions that Pierrette came down from her room that day when Brigaut had plunged into her morning dream like another dream. Having risen and opened her window, Mademoiselle Rogron must have heard the song and its words—compromising, no doubt, in the ears of an old maid; but Pierrette knew nothing of the causes that made her cousin so alert. Sylvie had good reasons for getting up and running to the window. For about a week past strange secret events and cruel pangs of feeling had agitated the principal figures in the Rogron *salon*. These unknown events, carefully concealed by all concerned, were to fall on Pierrette like an icy avalanche.

The realm of mysteries, which ought perhaps to be called the foul places of the human heart, lies at the bottom of the greatest revolutions, political, social, or domestic; but in speaking of them it may be extremely useful to explain that their algebraical expression, though accurate, is not faithful so far as form is concerned. These deep calculations do not express themselves so brutally as history reports them. Any attempt to relate the circumlocutions, the rhetorical involutions, the long colloquies, in which the mind designedly darkens the light it casts, the honeyed words diluting the venom of certain insinuations, would mean writing a book as long as the noble poem called *Clarissa Harlowe*.

Mademoiselle Habert and Mademoiselle Rogron were equally desirous of marrying; but one was ten years younger than the other, and probability allowed Céleste

Habert to think that her children would inherit the Rogrons' whole fortune. Sylvie was almost forty-two, an age at which marriage has its risks. In confiding their ideas to each other to secure mutual approbation, Céleste Habert, on a hint from the vindictive Abbé, had enlightened Sylvie as to the possibilities of the position. The Colonel, a violent man, with the health of a soldier, a burly bachelor of forty-five, would no doubt act on the moral of all fairy tales: they lived happy, and had many children. This form of happiness alarmed Sylvie; she was afraid of dying—a fear which tortures unmarried women to the utmost.

But the Martignac ministry was now established—the second victory which upset the Villèle administration. Vinet's party held their head high in Provins. Vinet, now the leading advocate of la Brie, carried all before him, to use a colloquialism. Vinet was a personage; the Liberals prophesied his advancement; he would certainly be a deputy or public prosecutor. As to the Colonel, he would be Mayor of Provins. Oh! to reign as Madame Garceland reigned, to be the Mayoress! Sylvie could not resist this hope; she determined to consult a doctor, though it might cover her with ridicule. The two women, one triumphant, and the other sure of having her in leading-strings, invented one of those stratagems which women advised by a priest are so clever in planning. To consult Monsieur Néraud, the Liberal physician, Monsieur Martener's rival, would be a blunder. Céleste Habert proposed to Sylvie to hide her in a dressing-closet while she, Mademoiselle Habert, consulted Monsieur Martener, who attended the school, on her own account. Whether he were Céleste's accomplice or no, Martener told his client that there was some, though very little, danger for a woman of thirty. 'But with your constitution,' he added, 'you have nothing to fear.'

'And if a woman is past forty?' asked Mademoiselle Céleste Habert.

'A woman of forty who has been married and had children need fear nothing.'

'But an unmarried woman, perfectly well conducted —for example, Mademoiselle Rogron?'

'Well conducted! There can be no doubt,' said Monsieur Martener. 'In such a case the safe birth of a child is a miracle which God certainly works sometimes, but rarely.'

'And why?' asked Céleste Habert.

Whereupon the doctor replied in a terrific pathological description, explaining that the elasticity bestowed by Nature on the muscles and joints in youth ceased to exist at a certain age, particularly in women whose occupations had made them sedentary for some years, like Mademoiselle Rogron.

'And so, after forty no respectable woman ought to marry?'

'Or she should wait,' replied the doctor. 'But then it is hardly a marriage; it is a partnership. What else could it be?'

In short, it was proved by this consultation, clearly, scientifically, seriously, and rationally, that after the age of forty a virtuous maiden should not rush into matrimony.

When Monsieur Martener had left, Mademoiselle Céleste Habert found Mademoiselle Rogron green and yellow, her eyes dilated,—in fact, in a frightful state.

'Then you truly love the Colonel?' said she.

'I still hoped,' said the old maid.

'Well, then, wait,' said Mademoiselle Habert, who knew that time would be avenged on the Colonel.

The morality of this marriage was also doubtful. Sylvie went to sound her conscience in the confessional. The stern director expounded the views of the Church, which regards marriage only as a means of propagating the race, reprobates second marriages, and scorns passions that have no social aim. Sylvie Rogron's perplexity was

great. These mental struggles gave strange force to her passion, and lent it the unaccountable charm which forbidden joys have always had for women since the time of Eve.

Mademoiselle Rogron's disturbed state could not escape the lawyer's keen eye. One evening, after cards, Vinet went up to his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to sit down with him on one of the sofas.

'Something ails you,' he said in her ear.

She gloomily bent her head. The pleader let Rogron leave the room, sat alone with the old maid, and got her to make a clean breast of it.

'Well played, Abbé! But you have played my game for me,' he said to himself after hearing of all the private consultations Sylvie had held, of which the last was the most alarming.

This sly legal fox was even more terrible in his explanations than the doctor had been; he advised the marriage, but only ten years hence for greater safety. The lawyer vowed that all the Rogron fortune should be Bathilde's. He rubbed his hands, and his very face grew sharper as he ran after Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf, whom he had left to start homewards with their servant armed with a lantern.

The influence exerted by Monsieur Habert, the physician of the soul, was entirely counteracted by Vinet, the physician of the purse. Rogron was by no means devout, so the man of the Church and the man of the Law, the two black gowns, pulled him opposite ways. When he heard of the victory carried off by Mademoiselle Habert, who hoped to marry Rogron, over Sylvie, hanging between the fear of death and the joy of becoming a baroness, Vinet perceived the possibility of removing the Colonel from the scene of battle. He knew Rogron well enough to find some means of making him marry the fair Bathilde. Rogron had not been able to resist the blandishments of Mademoiselle de

Chargebœuf; Vinet knew that the first time Rogron should be alone with Bathilde and himself their engagement would be settled. Rogron had come to the point of staring at Mademoiselle Habert, so shy was he of looking at Bathilde.

Vinet had just seen how much Sylvie was in love with the Colonel. He understood the depth of such a passion in an old maid, no less eaten up by bigotry, and he soon hit on a plan for ruining at one blow both Pierrette and the Colonel, getting rid of one by means of the other.

Next morning, on coming out of Court, he met the Colonel and Rogron walking together, their daily habit.

When these three men were seen together, their conjunction always made the town talk. This triumvirate, held in horror by the Sous-préfet, the Bench, and the Tiphaine partisans, made a triad of which the Liberals of Provins were proud. Vinet edited the *Courrier* single-handed; he was the head of the party; the Colonel, the responsible manager of the paper, was its arm; Rogron, with his money, formed the sinews; he was considered as the link between the managing committee at Provins and the managing committee in Paris. To hear the Tiphaines, these three men were always plotting something against the Government, while the Liberals admired them as defenders of the people. When the lawyer saw Rogron returning to the Square, brought homewards by the dinner-hour, he took the Colonel's arm and hindered him from accompanying the ex-haberdasher.

'Look here, Colonel,' said he, 'I am going to take a great weight off your shoulders. You can do better than marry Sylvie; if you go to work the right way, in two years' time you may marry little Pierrette Lorrain.'

And he told him the results of the Jesuit's manœuvring.

'What a clever stroke—and reaching so far!' said the Colonel.

'Colonel,' said Vinet gravely, 'Pierrette is a charming creature; you may be happy for the rest of your days. You have such splendid health, that such a match would not, for you, have the usual drawbacks of an ill-assorted marriage; still, do not imagine that this exchange of a terrible life for a pleasant one will be easy to effect. To convert your lady-love into your confidante is a manœuvre as dangerous as, in your profession, it is to cross a river under the enemy's fire. Keen as you are as a cavalry officer, you must study the position, and carry out your tactics with the superior skill which has won us our present position. If I should one day be public prosecutor, you may command the department. Ah! if only you had a vote, we should be further on our way. I might have bought the votes of those two officials by indemnifying them for the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority. I should be sitting by Dupin, Casimir Périer, and——'

The Colonel had for some time past been thinking of Pierrette, but he hid the thought with deep dissimulation; his roughness to Pierrette was only on the surface. The child could not imagine why the man who called himself her father's old comrade treated her so ill, when, if he met her alone, he put his hand under her chin and gave her a fatherly caress. Ever since Vinet had confided to him Mademoiselle Sylvie's terror of marriage, Gouraud had sought opportunities of seeing Pierrette alone, and then the rough officer was as mild as a cat; he would tell her how brave her father was, and say what a misfortune for her his death had been.

A few days before Brigaut's arrival, Sylvie had found Gouraud and Pierrette together. Jealousy had then entered into her soul with monastic vehemence. Jealousy, which is above all passions credulous and suspicious, is also that in which fancy has most power; but it does not lend wit, it takes it away; and in Sylvie jealousy gave birth to very strange ideas. She conceived that

the man who had sung the words 'Mistress Bride' to Pierrette must be the Colonel; and Sylvie thought she had reason to ascribe this serenade to the Colonel, because during the last week Gouraud's manner seemed to have undergone a change. This soldier was the only man who, in the solitude in which she had lived, had ever troubled himself about her; hence she watched him with all her eyes, all her understanding; and by dint of indulging in hopes alternately flourishing and blighted, she had given them so much scope that they produced the effect on her of a moral mirage. To use a fine but vulgar expression, by dint of looking she often saw nothing. By turns she rejected and struggled victoriously against the notion of this chimerical rivalry. She instituted comparisons between herself and Pierrette; she was forty, and her hair was grey; Pierrette was a deliciously white little girl, with eyes tender enough to bring warmth to a dead heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were fond of little girls like Pierrette.

Before the Colonel had sown his wild oats and frequented the Rogrons' drawing-room, Sylvie had heard at the Tiphaines' parties strange reports of Gouraud and his doings. Old maids in love have the exaggerated Platonic notions which girls of twenty are apt to profess; they have never lost the hard-and-fast ideas which cling to all who have no experience of life, nor learnt how social forces modify, erode, and coerce such fine and lofty notions. To Sylvie the idea of being deceived by her Colonel was a thought that hammered at her brain.

So from the hour, that morning, which every celibate spends in bed between waking and rising, the old maid had thought of nothing but herself and Pierrette, and the song which had aroused her by the words, 'Mistress Bride.' Like a simpleton, instead of peeping at the lover through the Venetian shutters, she had opened her window, without reflecting that Pierrette would hear her. If she had but had the common wit of a spy, she

would have seen Brigaut, and the fateful drama then begun would not have taken place.

Pierrette, weak as she was, removed the wooden bars which fastened the kitchen shutters, opened the shutters, and hooked them back, then she opened the passage door leading into the garden. She took the various brooms needed for sweeping the carpet, the dining-room floor, the passage, the stairs, in short, for cleaning everything with such care and exactitude as no servant, not even a Dutch one, would give to her work; she hated the least reproof. To her, happiness consisted in seeing Sylvie's little blue eyes, colourless and cold, with a look—not indeed of satisfaction, that they never wore—only calm when she had examined everything with the owner's eye, the inscrutable glance which sees what escapes the keenest observer.

By the time Pierrette returned to the kitchen her skin was moist; then she put everything in order, lighted the stove so as to have live charcoal, made the fire in her cousins' rooms, and put hot water for their toilet, though she had none for hers. She laid the table for breakfast and lighted the dining-room stove. For all these various tasks she had to go to the cellar to fetch brushwood, leaving a cool place to go to a hot one, or a hot place to go into the cold and damp. These sudden changes, made with the reckless haste of youth, merely to avoid a hard word, or to obey some order, aggravated the state of her health beyond remedy. Pierrette did not know that she was ill. Still she felt the beginnings of sufferings; she had strange longings, and hid them; a passion for raw salad, which she devoured in secret. The innocent child had no idea that this state meant serious disease, and needed the greatest care. Before Brigaut's arrival, if Néraud, who might accuse himself of her grandmother's death, had revealed this mortal peril to the little girl, she would have smiled; she found life too bitter not to smile at death. But within these last few

minutes, she, who added to her physical ailments the Breton home-sickness—a moral sickness so well known, that colonels of regiments reckon on it in the Bretons who serve in their regiments—she loved Provins. The sight of that gold-coloured flower, that song, the presence of the friend of her childhood, had revived her as a plant long deprived of water recovers after hours of rain. She wanted to live; she did not believe that she had suffered!

She timidly stole into Sylvie's room, lighted the fire, left the hot-water pot, spoke a few words, went to awake her guardian, and then ran downstairs to take in the milk, the bread, and the other provisions supplied by the tradesmen. She stood for some time on the doorstep, hoping that Brigaut would have the wit to return; but Brigaut was already on the road to Paris. She had dusted the drawing-room and was busy in the kitchen, when she heard her cousin Sylvie coming downstairs. Mademoiselle Rogron made her appearance in a Carmelite grey silk dressing-gown, on her head a tulle cap decorated with bows, her false curls put on askew, her night-dress showing above the wrapper, her feet slipshod in her slippers. She inspected everything, and came to her little cousin, who was waiting to know what they would have for breakfast.

'So there you are, Miss Ladylove!' said Sylvie to Pierrette, in a half-merry, half-mocking tone.

'I beg your pardon, cousin?'

'You crept into my room like a sneak and out again in the same way; but you must have known that I should have something to say to you.'

'To me?'

'You have had a serenade this morning like a princess, neither more nor less.'

'A serenade?' exclaimed Pierrette.

'A serenade?' echoed Sylvie, mimicking her. 'And you have a lover.'

'Cousin, what do you mean by a lover?' Sylvie evaded the question, and said—

'Do you dare to say, Mademoiselle, that a man did not come under our windows and talk to you of marriage!'

Persecution had taught Pierrette the cunning indispensable to slaves; she boldly replied, 'I do not know what you mean——'

'Dog——' added the old maid in vinegar tones.

'Cousin,' said Pierrette humbly.

'And you did not get up, I suppose, and did not go barefoot to your window? Enough to give you some bad illness. Well, catch it, and serve you right!—And I suppose you did not talk to your lover?'

'No, cousin.'

'I knew you had a great many faults, but I did not know you told lies. Think of what you are about, Mademoiselle. You will have to tell your cousin Denis and me all about the scene of this morning, and explain it too; otherwise your guardian will have to take strong measures.'

The old maid, devoured by jealousy and curiosity, was trying intimidation. Pierrette did as all people must who are enduring beyond their strength—she kept silence. Silence is to all creatures thus attacked the only means of salvation; it fatigues the Cossack charges of the envious, the enemy's savage rushes; it results in a crushing and complete victory. What is more complete than silence? It is final. Is it not one of the modes of the Infinite?

Sylvie looked stealthily at Pierrette. The child coloured; but instead of flushing all over, the red lay in patches on her cheeks, in burning spots of symptomatic hue. On seeing these signals of ill-health, a mother would at once have changed her note; she would have taken the child on her knee, have questioned her, have acquired long since a thousand proofs of Pierrette's

perfect and beautiful innocence, have suspected her weakness, and understood that the blood and humours diverted from their course were thrown back on the lungs after disturbing the digestive functions. Those eloquent scarlet patches would have warned her of imminent and mortal danger. But an old maid to whom the feelings that guard the family, the needs of childhood, the care required in early womanhood were all unknown, could have none of the indulgence and the pity that are inspired by the thousand incidents of married and maternal life. The sufferings of misery, instead of softening her heart, had made it callous.

'She blushes—she has done wrong!' thought Sylvie. So Pierrette's silence received the worst construction.

'Pierrette,' said she, 'before your cousin Denis comes down we will have a little talk.—Come,' she went on in a milder tone. 'Shut the door to the street. If any one comes, they will ring; we shall hear.'

In spite of the damp fog rising from the river, Sylvie led Pierrette along the gravelled path that zigzagged between the grass-plots, to the edge of the terrace built in a so-called picturesque style of broken rockwork planted with flags and other water-plants. The old cousin now changed her tactics; she would try to catch Pierrette by gentleness. The hyena would play the cat.

'Pierrette,' said she, 'you are no longer a child; you will soon set foot in your fifteenth year, and it would not be at all astonishing if you had a lover.'

'But, cousin,' said Pierrette, raising her eyes of angelic sweetness to her cousin's cold, sour face, for Sylvie had put on her saleswoman expression, 'what is a lover?'

It was impossible to Sylvie to define to her brother's ward with accuracy and decency what she meant by a lover; instead of regarding the question as the result of adorable innocence, she treated it as mendacious.

'A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves you and wishes to marry you.'

'Ah!' said Pierrette. 'In Brittany when two persons are agreed, we call the young man a suitor!'

'Well, understand that there is not the smallest harm in confessing your feeling for a man, my child. The harm is in secrecy. Have you, do you think, taken the fancy of any man who comes here?'

'I do not think so.'

'You do not love one of them?'

'No one.'

'Quite sure?'

'Quite sure.'

'Look me in the face, Pierrette.'

Pierrette looked at her cousin.

'And yet a man spoke to you from the Square this morning?'

Pierrette looked down.

'You went to your window, you opened it, and spoke to him.'

'No, cousin; I wanted to see what the weather was like, and I saw a country-man on the Square.'

'Pierrette, since your first Communion you have improved greatly, you are obedient and pious, you love your relations and God; I am pleased with you, but I never have told you so for fear of inflaming your pride.'

The horrible woman mistook the dejection, the submission, the silence of wretchedness for virtues! One of the sweetest things that brings comfort to the sufferer, to martyrs, to artists, in the midst of the Divine wrath roused in them by envy and hatred, is to meet with praise from some quarter whence they have always had blame and bad faith. So Pierrette looked up at her cousin with attentive eyes, and felt ready to forgive her all the pain she had caused her.

'But if it is all mere hypocrisy, if I am to find in you

a serpent I have cherished in my bosom, you would be an infamous, a horrible creature!'

'I do not think I have anything to blame myself for,' said Pierrette, feeling a dreadful pang at her heart on this sudden transition from unexpected praise to the terrible accent of the hyena.

'You know that lying is a mortal sin?'

'Yes, cousin.'

'Well, then, you stand before God!' said the old maid, pointing with a solemn gesture to the gardens and the sky. 'Swear to me that you do not know that countryman.'

'I will not swear,' said Pierrette.

'Ah! he was not a countryman! Little viper!'

Pierrette fled across the garden like a startled fawn, appalled by this moral dilemma. Her cousin called to her in an awful voice.

'The bell,' she replied.

'What a sly little wretch!' said Sylvie to herself. 'She has a perverse nature, and I am sure now that the little serpent has twisted herself round the Colonel. She has heard us say that he is a Baron. A Baroness, indeed! Little fool! Oh! I will be rid of her by placing her as an apprentice, and pretty soon too!'

Sylvie was so lost in thought that she did not see her brother coming down the walk and contemplating the mischief done by the frost to his dahlias.

'Well, Sylvie, what are you thinking about there? I thought you were looking at the fishes; sometimes they jump out of the water.'

'No,' said she.

'Well, how did you sleep?' and he proceeded to tell her his dreams of the past night. 'Do not you think that my face looks patchy?' a favourite word with the Rogrons. Since Rogron had loved—nay, we will not profane the word—had desired Mademoiselle de Charge-

bœuf, he had been very anxious about his appearance and himself.

At this moment Pierrette came down the steps and called to them that breakfast was ready. On seeing her little cousin, Sylvie's complexion turned green and yellow; all her bile rose. She examined the passage, and said that Pierrette ought to have polished it with foot-brushes.

'I will polish it if you wish,' replied the angel, not knowing how injurious this form of labour is to a young girl.

The dining-room was above blame. Sylvie sat down, and all through breakfast affected to want things that she never would have thought of in a calmer frame of mind, seeking for them simply to make Pierrette rise to fetch them, and always just as the poor child was beginning to eat. But mere nagging was not enough; she sought some subject for fault-finding, and fumed with internal rage at finding none. If they had been eating eggs, she would certainly have complained of the boiling of hers. She hardly replied to her brother's silly talk, and yet she looked only at him; her eyes avoided Pierrette, who was keenly aware of this behaviour.

Pierrette brought in the coffee for her cousins in a large silver cup, which served to heat the milk in, mixed with cream, in a saucepan of hot water. The brother and sister then added, to their taste, the black coffee which was made by Sylvie. When she had carefully prepared this dainty, Sylvie detected in it a faint cloud of coffee dust; she carefully skimmed it off the tawny mixture and looked at it, leaning over it to examine it more minutely. Then the storm burst.

'What is the matter?' asked Rogron.

'The matter! Miss, here, has put ashes in my coffee. Ashes in coffee are so nice! . . . Well, well! It is not astonishing; no one can do two things at once. Much she was thinking of the coffee! A blackbird

might have flown through the kitchen, and she would not have heeded it this morning! How should she see the ashes flying? And then—only her cousin's!—Much she cares about it!'

She went on in this way, while she elaborately laid on the edge of her plate some fine coffee that had passed through the filter, mixed with some grains of sugar that had not melted.

'But, cousin, that is coffee,' said Pierrette.

'So I am a liar now?' exclaimed Sylvie, looking at Pierrette, and scorching her by a fearful flash that her eyes could dart when she was angry.

These temperaments, which passion has never exhausted, have at command a great supply of the vital fluid. This phenomenon of extreme brightness in her eye under the influence of rage was all the more confirmed in Mademoiselle Rogron because formerly, in her shop, she had had occasion to try the power of her gaze by opening her eyes enormously wide, always to fill her dependants with salutary terror.

'I will teach you to give me the lie,' she went on; 'you, who deserve to be sent away from table to feed by yourself in the kitchen.'

'What is the matter with you both?' cried Rogron. 'You are as cross as two sticks this morning.'

'Oh, my lady knows what I mean! I am giving her time to make up her mind before speaking to you about it, for I am much kinder to her than she deserves.'

Pierrette looked through the window out on to the Square, so as not to meet her cousin's eyes, which frightened her.

'She pays no more heed than if I were talking to this sugar-basin! And she has sharp ears too; she can speak from the top of the house to answer some one below. . . . She is that perverse! Your ward is aggravating beyond words, and you need look for nothing good from her; do you hear me, Rogron?'

'What has she done that is so wicked?' asked her brother.

'At her age too! It is beginning young!' cried the old maid in a fury.

Pierrette rose to clear away, just to keep herself in countenance; she did not know which way to look. Though such language was nothing new to her, she never could get used to it. Her cousin's rage made her feel as though she had committed some crime. She wondered what her rage would be if she knew of Brigaut's escapade. Perhaps they would keep Brigaut away. All the thousand ideas of a slave crowded on her at once, thoughts swift and deep, and she resolved to resist by absolute silence as to an incident in which her conscience could see no evil.

She had to endure words so cruel, so harsh, insinuations so insulting, that on her return to the kitchen she was seized with cramp in the stomach and a violent attack of sickness. She dared not complain; she was not sure of getting any care. She turned pale and faint, said that she felt ill, and went up to bed, clinging to the banisters at every step, and believing that her last hour had come. 'Poor Brigaut!' thought she.

'She is ill,' said Rogron.

'She ill! It is all meagrims,' said Sylvie, loud enough to be overheard. 'She was not ill this morning, I can tell you!'

This last shot was too much for Pierrette, who crept to bed in tears, praying to God to remove her from this world.

For a month past Rogron had no longer carried the *Constitutionnel* to Gouraud; the Colonel obsequiously came to fetch the newspaper, to make talk, and take Rogron out when the weather was fine. Sylvie, sure of seeing the Colonel, and being able to question him, dressed herself coquettishly. The old maid thought she

achieved this by putting on a green gown, a little yellow cashmere shawl bordered with red, and a white bonnet with meagre grey feathers. At the hour when the Colonel was due, she settled herself in the drawing-room with her brother, making him keep on his dressing-gown and slippers.

'It is a fine morning, Colonel,' said Rogron, hearing Gouraud's heavy step; 'but I am not dressed, my sister perhaps wanted to go out, she left me to mind the house; wait for me.'

Rogron went off, leaving Sylvie with the Colonel.

'Where are you going? you are dressed like a goddess,' observed Gouraud, seeing a certain solemnity of expression on the old maid's battered face.

'Yes, I was going out; but as the child is not well, I must stay at home.'

'What is the matter with her?'

'I do not know; she asked to go to bed.'

Gouraud's cautiousness, not to say his distrust, was constantly on the alert as a result of his collusion with Vinet. The lawyer evidently had the best of it. He edited the paper, he ruled it as a master, and applied the profits to the editing; whereas the Colonel, the responsible stalking-horse, got little enough. Who was to be the député? Vinet. Who the great electioneer? Vinet. Who was always consulted? Vinet.

Then he knew, at least as well as Vinet, the extent and depth of the passion consuming Rogron for the fair Bathilde de Chargebœuf. This passion was becoming a mania, as all the lowest passions of men do. Bathilde's voice made the old bachelor thrill. Rogron, thinking only of his desire, concealed it; he dared not hope for such a match. The Colonel, to sound him, had told Rogron that he was about to propose for Bathilde's hand; Rogron had turned pale at the mere thought of such a formidable rival; he had become cold to Gouraud, almost hostile. Thus Vinet in every way ruled the

roast, while he, the Colonel, was tied to the house only by the doubtful bond of a love which, on his part, was but feigned, and on Sylvie's as yet unconfessed. When the lawyer had divulged the priest's manœuvre and advised him to throw over Sylvie and pay his addresses to Pierrette, Vinet had humoured his inclinations; still, as the Colonel analysed the true purport of this suggestion, and examined the ground on which he stood, he fancied he could discern in his ally some hope of making mischief between him and Sylvie, and taking advantage of the old maid's fears to make the whole of Rogron's fortune fall into Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf's hands.

Hence, when Rogron left him alone with Sylvie, the Colonel's acumen seized on the slight indications which betrayed some uneasiness in Sylvie. He saw that she had planned to be under arms and alone with him for a minute. Gouraud, who already vehemently suspected Vinet of playing him some malignant trick, ascribed this conference to a secret suggestion of this legal ape; he put himself on guard, as when he had been making a reconnaissance in the enemy's country, keeping an eye on the whole prospect, listening for the least sound, his mind alert, his hand on his weapon. It was the Colonel's weakness never to believe a word said by a woman; and when the old maid spoke of Pierrette, and said she was in bed at midday, he concluded that Sylvie had simply put her in disgrace in her room out of jealousy.

'The child is growing very pretty,' said he, in an indifferent tone.

'Yes, she will be pretty,' replied Mademoiselle Rogron.

'You ought now to send her to a shop in Paris,' added the Colonel. 'She would make a fortune. They look out for very pretty girls now in the milliners' shops.'

'Is that really your advice?' asked Sylvie, in an anxious voice.

'Good! I have hit it!' thought the Colonel. 'Vinet's

advice that Pierrette and I should marry by-and-by was only intended to place me in this old witch's black-books.—Why,' he said aloud, 'what do you expect to do with her? Do you not see a perfectly lovely girl, Bathilde de Chargebœuf, of noble birth, well connected, and left to become an old maid. No one will have anything to say to her. Pierrette has nothing; she will never marry. Do you suppose that youth and beauty have any attraction for me, for instance?—for me, who, as Captain of Artillery in the Imperial Guard from the first day when the Emperor had a guard, have had my feet in every capital in Europe, and known the prettiest women in them all?—Youth and beauty—they are deuced common and silly. Don't talk of them to me!

'At eight-and-forty,' he went on, adding to his age, 'when a man has gone through the retreat from Moscow and the dreadful campaign in France, his loins are a bit weary; I am an old fellow. Now, a wife like you would cosset me and take care of me; her fortune, added to my few thousand francs of pension, would secure me suitable comfort for my old age, and I should like her a thousand times better than a minx who would give me no end of trouble, who would be thirty and have her passions when I should be sixty and have the rheumatism. At my time of life we think of these things. And, between you and me, I may add that if I marry, I should hope to have no children.'

Sylvie's face was transparent to the Colonel all through this speech, and her reply was enough to assure him of Vinet's perfidy.

'So you are not in love with Pierrette?' she exclaimed.

'Bless me! Are you crazy, my dear Sylvie?' cried he. 'When we have lost all our teeth, is it the time to crack nuts? Thank God, I still have my wits, and know myself.'

Sylvie would not then say more about herself; she thought herself very wily in using her brother's name.

'My brother,' said she, 'had thought of your marrying her.'

'Your brother can never have had such a preposterous notion. A few days ago, to find out his secret, I told him that I was in love with Bathilde; he turned as white as your collar.'

'Is he in love with Bathilde?' said Sylvie.

'Madly! And Bathilde certainly loves only his money.'—('One for you, Vinet,' thought Gouraud).—'What should have made him speak of Pierrette?—No, Sylvie,' he went on, taking her hand and pressing it with meaning, 'since you have led to the subject'—he went close to her—'well'—he kissed her hand; he was a cavalry colonel, and had given proofs of courage—'know this: I want no wife but you. Though the marriage will look like a marriage for money, I feel true affection for you.'

'But it was I who wished that you should marry Pierrette; and if I were to give her my money—what then, Colonel?'

'But I do not want to have a wretched home, or to see, ten years hence, some young whippersnapper, such as Julliard, hovering round my wife, and writing verses to her in the newspaper. I am too much a man on that score; I will never marry a woman out of all proportion too young.'

'Well, Colonel, we will talk that over seriously,' said Sylvie, with a glance she thought amorous, and which was very like that of an ogress. Her cold, raw purple lips parted over her yellow teeth, and she fancied she was smiling.

'Here I am,' said Rogron, and he led away the Colonel, who bowed courteously to the old maid.

Gouraud was determined to hasten his marriage with Sylvie, and so become master of the house; promising himself that, through the influence he would acquire over Sylvie during the honeymoon, he would get rid both of

Bathilde and of Céleste Habert. So, as they walked, he told Rogron that he had been making fun of him the other day; that he had no intentions of winning Bathilde's heart, not being rich enough to take a wife who had no money. Then he confided his projects; he had long since chosen Sylvie for her admirable qualities; in short, he aspired to the honour of becoming his brother-in-law.

'Oh, Colonel! Oh, Baron! If only my consent were needed, it would be done as soon as legal delays should allow!' cried Rogron, delighted to find himself relieved of this terrible rival.

Sylvie spent the whole morning examining her own rooms to see if there were accommodation for a couple. She determined on building a second story for her brother, and having the first floor for herself and her husband; but she also promised herself, in accordance with the notions of every old maid, to put the Colonel to some tests, so as to judge of his heart and habits before making up her mind. She still had doubts, and wanted to make sure that Pierrette had no intimacy with the Colonel.

At dinner-time the girl came down to lay the cloth. Sylvie had been obliged to do the cooking, and had spotted her gown, exclaiming, 'Curse Pierrette!' For it was evident, indeed, that if Pierrette had cooked the dinner, Sylvie would not have had a grease-stain on her silk dress.

'So here you are, you little coddle. You are like the blacksmith's dog that sleeps under the forge and wakes at the sound of a saucepan. So you want me to believe that you are ill, you little story-teller!'

The one idea, 'You did not confess the truth as to what took place this morning, therefore everything you say is a lie,' was like a hammer with which Sylvie was prepared to hit incessantly on Pierrette's head and heart.

To Pierrette's great astonishment, Sylvie sent her, after

dinner, to dress for the evening. The liveliest imagination is no match for the energy which suspicion gives to the mind of an old maid. In such a case, the old maid beats politicians, attorneys and notaries, bill-brokers and misers. Sylvie promised herself that she would consult Vinet after looking well about her. She meant to keep Pierrette in the room, so as to judge for herself by the child's face whether the Colonel had told the truth.

The first to come were Madame de Chargebœuf and her daughter. By her cousin Vinet's advice, Bathilde had dressed with twice her usual elegance. She wore a most becoming blue cotton-velvet gown, the clear kerchief as before, bunches of grapes in garnets and gold for earrings, her hair in ringlets, the artful necklet, little black satin shoes, grey silk stockings, and Suède gloves, and then queenly airs and girlish coquettishness enough to catch every Rogron in the river. Her mother, calm and dignified, had preserved, as had Bathilde, a certain aristocratic impertinence by which these two women redeemed everything, betraying the spirit of their caste. Bathilde was gifted with superior intelligence, though Vinet alone had been able to discern it after the two months that these ladies had spent in his house. When he had sounded the depths of this girl, depressed by the uselessness of her youth and beauty, but enlightened by the contempt she felt for the men of a period when money was their sole idol, Vinet exclaimed in surprise—

'If I had but married you, Bathilde, by this time I should have been Keeper of the Seals; I would have called myself Vinet de Chargebœuf, and have sat on the right.'

Bathilde had no vulgar aims in her wish to be married; she would not marry for motherhood, nor for the sake of having a husband; she would marry to be free, to have a 'responsible publisher,' as it were—to be called Madame, and to act as men act. Rogron to her was a name; she thought she could make something of

this imbecile creature—a député, who might vote while she pulled the wires; she wanted to be revenged on her family, who had paid little heed to a penniless girl. Vinet, admiring and encouraging her ideas, had greatly extended and strengthened them.

'My dear cousin,' said he, explaining to her the influence exerted by women, and pointing out the sphere of action proper to them, 'do you suppose that Tiphaine, a profoundly mediocre man, can by his own merits rise to sit on the lower bench in Paris? It is Madame Tiphaine who got him returned as deputy; it is she who will carry him to Paris. Her mother, Madame Roguin, is a cunning body, who does what she pleases with du Tillet the banker, one of Nucingen's chief allies, both of them close friends of Keller's; and these three houses do great services to the Government or its most devoted adherents; the offices are on the best possible terms with these lynxes of the financial world, and men like those know all Paris. There is nothing to hinder Tiphaine from rising to be the Presiding Judge of one of the higher Courts.—Marry Rogron; we will make him deputy for Provins as soon as I have secured for myself some other constituency in Seine-et-Marne. Then you will have a receivership—one of those places where Rogron will have nothing to do but to sign his name. We will stick to the Opposition if it triumphs; but if the Bourbons remain in power, O how gently we will incline towards the centre! Besides, Rogron will not live for ever, and you can marry a title by-and-by. And then, if you are in a good position, the Chargebœufs will help us. Your poverty—like mine—has, no doubt, enabled you to estimate what men are worth; they are to be made use of only as post-horses. A man or a woman can take us from one stage to the next!'

Vinet had made a little Catherine de Medici of Bathilde. He left his wife at home, happy with her two

children, and always attended Madame de Chargebœuf and Bathilde to the Rogrons'. He appeared in all his glory as the tribune of Champagne. He wore neat gold spectacles, a silk waistcoat, a white cravat, black trousers, thin boots, a black coat made in Paris, a gold watch and chain. Instead of the Vinet of old—pale, lean, haggard, and gloomy—he exhibited the Vinet of the day, in all the bravery of a political personage; sure of his luck, he trod with the decision peculiar to a busy advocate familiar with the caverns of justice. His small, cunning head was so smartly brushed, and his clean-shaven chin gave him such a finished though cold appearance, that he looked quite pleasing, in the style of Robespierre. He might certainly become a delightful public prosecutor, with an elastic, dangerous, and deadly flow of eloquence, or an orator, with all the subtlety of Benjamin Constant. The acrimony and hatred which had formerly animated him had turned to perfidious softness. The poison had become medicine.

'Good evening, my dear, how are you?' said Madame de Chargebœuf to Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, took off her hat, looked at herself in the glass, and put her pretty foot on the bar of the fender to display it to Rogron.

'What ails you, Monsieur?' said she, looking at him. 'You give me no greeting? Well, indeed! I may put on a velvet frock for your benefit . . .'

She stopped Pierrette, bidding her put her hat on a chair, and the girl took it from her, Bathilde resigning it to her as though Pierrette had been the housemaid.

Men are thought very fierce, and so are tigers; but neither tigers, nor vipers, nor diplomates, nor men of law, nor executioners, nor kings, can in their utmost atrocities come near the gentle cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage scorn of young ladies to each other when certain of them think themselves superior to others in birth, fortune, or grace, and when marriage is in

question, or precedence, or, in short, any feminine rivalry. The 'Thank you, Mademoiselle,' spoken by Bathilde to Pierrette, was a poem in twelve cantos.

Her name was Bathilde, the other's was Pierrette; she was a Chargebœuf, the other a Lorrain! Pierrette was undersized and fragile, Bathilde was tall and full of vitality! Pierrette was fed by charity, Bathilde and her mother lived on their own money! Pierrette wore a stuff frock with a deep tucker, Bathilde dragged the serpentine folds of her blue velvet; Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, and an arm like a queen's, Pierrette's shoulder-blades and arms were skinny; Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde the fairy; Bathilde would get married, Pierrette would die a maid! Bathilde was worshipped, Pierrette had no one to love her! Bathilde had her hair dressed—she had taste, Pierrette hid her hair under a little cap, and knew nothing of the fashions! *Epilogue*—Bathilde was everything, Pierrette was nothing. The proud little Bretonne perfectly understood this cruel poem.

'Good evening, child,' said Madame de Chargebœuf from the summit of her grandeur, and with an accent given by her narrow pinched nose.

Vinet put the crowning touch to these insulting civilities by looking at Pierrette and saying, on three notes, 'Oh, oh, oh! How fine we are this evening, Pierrette!'

'I!' said the poor child. 'You should say that to your cousin, not to me. She is beautiful!'

'Oh, my cousin is always beautiful,' replied the lawyer. 'Do not you say so, Père Rogron?' he added, turning to the master of the house, and shaking hands with him.

'Yes,' said Rogron.

'Why force him to say what he does not think? I never was to his taste,' replied Bathilde, placing herself in front of Rogron. 'Is not that the truth?—Look at me.'

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and gently closed his eyes, like a cat when its poll is scratched.

'You are too beautiful,' said he, 'too dangerous to look at.'

'Why?'

Rogron gazed at the fire-logs and said nothing.

At this moment Mademoiselle Habert came, followed by the Colonel. Céleste Habert, everybody's enemy now, had none but Sylvie on her side; but each one showed her all the greater consideration, politeness, and amiable attention because all were undermining her, so that she doubted between this display of civil interest and the distrust which her brother had implanted in her. The priest, though standing apart from the theatre of war, guessed everything; and so, when he perceived that his sister's hopes were at an end, he became one of the Rogrons' most formidable antagonists.

The reader can at once imagine what Mademoiselle Habert was like on being told that even if she had not been mistress—arch-mistress—of a school, she would still always have looked like a governess. Governesses have a particular way of putting on their caps. Just as elderly Englishwomen have monopolised the fashion of turbans, so governesses have the monopoly of these caps; the crown of the cap towers above the flowers, the flowers are more than artificial; stored carefully in a wardrobe, this cap is always new and always old, even on the first day. These old maids make it a point of honour to be like a painter's lay-figure; they sit on their haunches, not on their chairs. When they are spoken to they turn their whole body; and when their gowns creak, we are tempted to believe that the springs of the machinery are out of order. Mademoiselle Habert, a type of her kind, had a hard eye, a set mouth, and under her chin, furrowed with wrinkles, the limp and crumpled capstrings wagged and frisked as she moved. She had an added charm in two moles, rather

large and rather brown, with hairs that she left to grow like untied clematis. Finally, she took snuff, and without grace.

They sat down to the toil of boston. Sylvie had opposite to her Mademoiselle Habert, and the Colonel sat on one side, opposite Madame de Chargebœuf. Bathilde placed herself near her mother and Rogron. Sylvie put Pierrette between herself and the Colonel. Rogron opened another card-table in case Monsieur Néraud should come, and Monsieur Cournant and his wife. Vinet and Bathilde could both play whist, which was Monsieur and Madame Cournant's game. Ever since the Chargebœuf ladies—as they say in Provins—had been in the habit of coming to the Rogrons, the two lamps blazed on the chimney-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by wax lights at two francs a pound, which, however, was paid by winnings at cards.

'Now, Pierrette, my child, take your sewing,' said Sylvie with treacherous gentleness, seeing her watch the Colonel's play.

In public she always pretended to treat Pierrette very kindly. This mean deceit irritated the honest Bretonne, and made her despise her cousin. Pierrette fetched her embroidery; but as she set the stitches, she looked now and then at the Colonel's game. Gouraud seemed not to know that there was a little girl at his side. Sylvie began to think this indifference extremely suspicious. At a certain moment in the game the old maid declared *misère* in hearts; the pool was full of counters, and there were twenty-seven sous in it besides. The Cournants and Néraud had come. The old supernumerary judge, Desfondrilles—a man in whom the Minister of Justice had discerned the qualifications for a judge when appointing him examining magistrate, but who was never thought clever enough for a superior position—had for the last two months forsaken the Tiphaines, and

shown a leaning towards Vinet's party. He was now standing in front of the fire, holding up his coat-tails, and gazing at the gorgeous drawing-room in which Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf shone; for the setting of crimson looked as if it had been contrived on purpose to show off the beauty of this magnificent young woman. Silence reigned; Pierrette watched the play, and Sylvie's attention was diverted by the excitement of the game.

'Play that,' said Pierrette to the Colonel, pointing to a heart.

The Colonel led from a sequence in hearts; the hearts lay between him and Sylvie; the Colonel forced the ace, though it was guarded in Sylvie's hand by five small cards.

'It is not fair play! Pierrette saw my hand, and the Colonel allowed her to advise him!'

'But, Mademoiselle,' said Céleste, 'it was the Colonel's game to lead hearts since he found that you had one!'

The speech made Desfondrilles smile; he was a keen observer, who amused himself with watching all the interests at stake in Provins, where he played the part of *Rigaudin* in Picard's play of *la Maison en loterie*.

'It was the Colonel's game,' Cournant put in, without knowing anything about it.

Sylvie shot at Mademoiselle Habert a look of old maid against old maid, villainous but honeyed.

'Pierrette, you saw my hand,' said Sylvie, fixing her eyes on the girl.

'No, cousin.'

'I was watching you all,' said the archæological judge; 'I can bear witness that the little girl saw no one's hand but the Colonel's.

'Pooh! these little girls know very well how to steal a glance with their sweet eyes,' said Gouraud in alarm.

'Indeed!' said Sylvie.

'Yes,' replied Gouraud; 'she may have looked over

your hand to play you a trick. Was it not so, my beauty?'

'No,' said the honest Bretonne. 'I am incapable of such a thing! In that case I should have followed my cousin's game.'

'You know very well that you are a story-teller and a little fool into the bargain,' said Sylvie. 'Since what took place this morning, who can believe a word you say? You are a . . .'

Pierrette did not wait to hear her cousin end the sentence in her presence. Anticipating a torrent of abuse, she rose, went out of the room without a light, and up to her room. Sylvie turned pale with rage, and muttered between her teeth, 'I will pay her out!'

'Will you pay your losses?' said Madame de Chargebœuf.

At this moment poor Pierrette hit her head against the passage door which the judge had left open.

'Good! That serves her right!' cried Sylvie.

'What has happened?' asked Desfondrilles.

'Nothing that she does not deserve,' replied Sylvie.

'She has given herself some severe blow,' said Mademoiselle Habert.

Sylvie tried to evade paying her stakes by rising to see what Pierrette had done; but Madame de Chargebœuf stopped her.

'Pay us first,' said she, laughing; 'by the time you return you will have forgotten all about it.'

This suggestion, based on the bad faith the ex-haberdasher showed in the matter of her gambling debts, met with general approval. Sylvie sat down and thought no more of Pierrette; and no one was surprised at her indifference. All the evening Sylvie was absent-minded. When cards were over, at about half-past nine, she sank into an easy-chair by the fire, and only rose to take leave of her guests. The Colonel tortured her; she did not know what to think about him.

'Men are so false!' said she to herself as she fell asleep.

Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow against the edge of the door, just over her ear, where girls part their hair to put the forepart into curl-papers. Next morning there was a bad purple-veined bruise.

'God has punished you,' said Sylvie at breakfast; 'you disobeyed me, you showed a great want of respect in not listening to me, and in going away in the middle of my sentence. You have no more than you deserve.'

'Still,' said Rogron, 'you should put on a rag dipped in salt and water.'

'Pooh! It is nothing!' said Sylvie.

The poor child had come to the point when she thought her guardian's remark a proof of interest.

The week ended as it had begun, in constant torment. Sylvie became ingenious, and carried her refinement of tyranny to an extreme pitch. The Illinois, Cherokees, and Mohicans might have learnt of her. Pierrette dared not complain of her indefinite misery and the pain she suffered in her head. At the bottom of Sylvie's displeasure lay the girl's refusal to tell anything about Brigaut; and Pierrette, with Breton obstinacy, was determined to keep a very natural silence. Every one can imagine what a glance she gave Brigaut who, as she believed, would be lost to her if he were discovered, and whom she instinctively longed to keep near her, happy in knowing that he was at Provins. What a delight to her to see Brigaut again! The sight of the companion of her childhood was to her like the view an exile gets from afar of his native land; she looked on him as a martyr gazes at the sky when, during his torments, his eyes, blessed with double sight, see through to heaven.

Pierrette's parting glance had been so perfectly intelligible to the Major's son, that while he planed his boards, opened his compasses, took his measurements, and fitted

his pieces, he racked his brains for some means of corresponding with Pierrette. Brigaut at last hit on this extremely simple plan. At a certain hour at night Pierrette must let down a string, and he would tie a letter to the end of it. In the midst of her terrible sufferings from two maladies, an abscess which was forming in her head, and her general disorderment, Pierrette was sustained by the idea of corresponding with Brigaut. The same desire agitated both hearts; though apart, they understood each other! At every pang that made her heart flutter, at every pain that shot through her brain, Pierrette said to herself, 'Brigaut is at hand!' and then she could suffer without complaining.

On the next market-day after their first meeting in the church, Brigaut looked out for his little friend. Though he saw that she was pale, and trembling like a November leaf about to drop from the bough, without losing his head he went to bargain for some fruit at the stall where the terrible Sylvie was beating down the price of her purchases. Brigaut contrived to slip a note into Pierrette's hand, and he did it naturally, while jesting with the market woman, and with all the dexterity of a rake, as if he had never done anything else, so coolly did he manage it, in spite of the hot blood that sang in his ears and surged boiling from his heart, almost bursting the veins and arteries. On the surface he had the determination of an old housebreaker, and within the quaking heart of innocence, like mothers sometimes in their mortal anguish, when they are gripped between two dangers, between two precipices. Pierrette felt Brigaut's dizziness; she crushed the paper into her apron pocket; the pallor of her cheeks changed to the cherry redness of a fierce fire. These two children each unconsciously went through sensations enough for ten commonplace love-affairs. That instant left in their souls a wellspring of emotions. Sylvie, who did not recognise the Breton accent, could not suspect a lover

in Brigaut, and Pierrette came home with her treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were destined to serve as documents in a horrible legal squabble; for, but for that fatal circumstance, they never would have been seen. This is what Pierrette read that evening in her room :—

'My dear Pierrette,—At midnight, when everybody is asleep, but when I shall be awake for your sake, I will come every night under the kitchen window. You can let down out of your window a string long enough to reach me, which will make no noise, and tie to the end of it whatever you want to write to me. I will answer you in the same way. I knew that you had been taught to read and write by those wretched relations who were to do you so much good, and who are doing you so much harm! You, Pierrette, the daughter of a Colonel who died for France, are compelled by these monsters to cook for them! That is how your pretty colour and your fine health have vanished. What has become of my Pierrette? What have they done to her? I can see plainly that you are not happy.

'Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Brittany. I can earn enough to give you everything you need; you may have three francs a day, for I earn from four to five, and thirty sous are plenty for me. Oh! Pierrette, how I have prayed to God for you since seeing you again. I have asked Him to give me all your pain, and to grant you all the pleasures.

'What have you to do with them that they keep you? Your grandmother is more to you than they are. These Rogrons are venomous; they have spoilt all your gaiety. You do not even walk at Provins as you used to move in Brittany. Let us go home to Brittany. In short, here I am to serve you, to do your bidding; and you must tell me what you wish. If you want money, I have sixty crowns of ours, and I shall have the grief of

sending them to you by the string instead of kissing your dear hands respectfully when I give you the money. Ah! my dear Pierrette, the blue sky has now for a long time been dark to me. I have not had two hours of joy since I put you into that ill-starred diligence; and when I saw you again, like a shade, that witch of a cousin disturbed our happiness. However, we shall have the comfort of praying to God together every Sunday; He will perhaps hear us the better. Not good-bye, dear Pierrette, only till to-night.'

This letter agitated her so greatly that she sat for above an hour reading and re-reading it; but she reflected, not without pain, that she had nothing to write with. So she made up her mind to the difficult expedition from her attic to the dining-room, where she could find ink, pen, and paper; and she accomplished it without waking Sylvie. A few minutes before midnight she had finished this letter, which was also produced in Court:—

'My Friend,—Oh yes, my friend! For there is no one but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, who loves me. God forgive me, but you are the only two persons I love, one as much as the other, neither more nor less. I was too little to remember my mother; but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, and my grandfather too, God rest his soul, for he suffered much from his ruin, which was mine too—in short, you are the only two remaining, and I love you as much as I am wretched! So to know how much I love you, you would have to know how much I suffer; but I do not wish that—it would make you too unhappy. I am spoken to as you would not speak to a dog; I am treated as if I were dirt; and in vain I examine myself as if I were before God, I cannot see that I am in fault towards them. Before you sang the bride's song to me I saw that God was good in my misery; for I prayed to Him to take me out of this world, and as I felt very ill, I said to myself, "God has heard me!"

'But since you have come, Brigaut, I want to go away with you to Brittany to see my grandmamma, who loves me, though they tell me she has robbed me of eight thousand francs. Brigaut, if they are really mine, can you get them? But it is all a lie; if we had eight thousand francs, grandmamma would not be at Saint-Jacques. I would not trouble that good saintly woman's last days by telling her of my miseries; it would be enough to kill her. Ah! if she could know that they make her grandchild wash the pots and pans—she who would say to me, "Leave that alone, my darling," when I tried to help her in her troubles; "leave it, leave it, my pet; you will spoil your pretty little hands." Well, my nails are clean at any rate! Many times I cannot carry the market basket, and the handle saws my arm as I come home from market.

'At the same time, I do not think that my cousins are cruel; but it is their way always to be scolding, and it would seem that I can never get away from them. My cousin Rogron is my guardian. One day when I meant to run away, as I was too miserable, and I told them so, my cousin Sylvie answered that the police would go after me, that the law was on my guardian's side; and I saw very clearly that cousins can no more take the place of our father and mother than the Saints can take the place of God.—My poor Jacques, what use could I make of your money? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how I have thought of you and Pen-Hoël and the large pool. We ate our cake first, out there, for I think I am getting worse. I am very ill, Jacques. I have such pains in my head that I could scream, and in my back and my bones; something round my loins that half kills me; and I have no appetite but for nasty things, leaves and roots, and I like the smell of printed paper. There are times when I should cry if I were alone, for I may not do anything as I wish; I am not even allowed to cry. I have to hide myself to offer up my tears to

Him from whom we receive those mercies which we call our afflictions. Was it not He who inspired you with the good idea of coming to sing the bride's song under my window?—Oh! Jacques, cousin Sylvie, who heard you, told me I had a lover. If you will be my lover, love me very much; I promise always to love you, as in the past, and to be your faithful servant,

'PIERRETTE LORRAIN.

'You will always love me, won't you?'

The girl had taken a crust of bread from the kitchen, in which she made a hole to stick her letter in, so as to weight the thread. At midnight, after opening her window with excessive caution, she let down her note with the bread, which could make no noise by tapping against the wall or the shutters. She felt the thread pulled by Brigaut, who broke it, and then went stealthily away. When he was in the middle of the Square she could see him, though indistinctly, in the starlight; but he could gaze at her in the luminous band projected by the candle. The two young things remained there for an hour, Pierrette signalling to him to go away, he going and she remaining, and he returning to his post, while Pierrette again waved to him to be gone. This was several times repeated, till the girl shut her window, got into bed, and blew out her light.

Once in bed, she went to sleep, happy though suffering; she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept the sleep of the persecuted, a sleep blessed by the angels, the sleep of golden and far-away glories full of the arabesques of heaven, which Raphael dreamed of and drew.

Her delicate physical nature was so responsive to her moral nature that Pierrette rose next morning as glad and light as a lark, beaming and gay. Such a change could not escape Sylvie's eye; this time, instead of

scolding her, she proceeded to watch her with the cunning of a raven.

'What makes her so happy?' was suggested by jealousy, and not by tyranny. If Sylvie had not been possessed by the idea of the Colonel, she would certainly have said as usual, 'Pierrette, you are very turbulent, or very heedless of what is said to you.' The old maid determined to spy on Pierrette, as only old maids can spy. The day passed in gloom and silence, like the hour before a storm.

'So you are no longer so ailing, Miss?' said Sylvie at dinner. 'Did not I tell you that she shams it all to worry us?' she exclaimed, turning to her brother, without waiting for Pierrette's reply.

'On the contrary, cousin, I have a sort of fever——'

'What sort of fever? You are as gay as a linnet. You have seen some one again perhaps?'

Pierrette shuddered, and kept her eyes on her plate.

'*Tartufe!*' cried Sylvie. 'At fourteen! Already! What a nature! Why, you will be a wretch indeed!'

'I do not know what you mean,' replied Pierrette, raising her fine luminous hazel eyes to her cousin's face.

'This evening,' said Sylvie, 'you will remain in the dining-room to sew by a candle. You are in the way in the drawing-room, and I will not have you looking over my hand to advise your favourites.'

Pierrette did not flinch.

'Hypocrite!' exclaimed Sylvie as she left the room.

Rogron, who could not understand what his sister was talking about, said to Pierrette, 'What is the matter between you two? Try, Pierrette, to please your cousin; she is most indulgent, most kind; and if she is put out with you, certainly you must be wrong. Why do you squabble? For my part, I like a quiet life. Look at Mademoiselle Bathilde; you should try to copy her.'

Pierrette could bear it all; Brigaut would come,

beyond doubt, at midnight to bring his answer, and this hope was her viaticum for the day. But she was exhausting her last strength. She did not go to sleep; she sat up listening to the clocks strike the hours, and fearing to make a sound. At last twelve struck; she softly opened her window, and this time she used a string she had made long enough by tying several bits together. She heard Brigaut's step, and when she drew up the string she read the following letter, which filled her with joy :—

'My dear Pierrette,—If you are in such pain, you must not tire yourself by sitting up for me. You will be sure to hear me call like a *Chouan*. My father luckily taught me to imitate their cry. So I shall repeat it three times, and you will know that I have come, and that you must let down the string, but I shall not come again for some few days. I hope then to have good news for you. Oh! Pierrette, not death! What are you thinking of? All my heart quaked; I thought I was dead myself at the mere idea. No, my Pierrette, you shall not die; you shall live happy, and soon be rescued from your persecutors. If I should not succeed in what I am attempting, to save you, I would go to the lawyers and declare in the face of heaven and earth how you are treated by your cruel relations.

'I am certain that you have only to endure a few days more: take patience. Pierrette, Brigaut is watching over you, as he did in the days when we went to slide on the pond, and I pulled you out of the deep hole where we were so nearly lost together. Good-bye, my dear Pierrette; in a few days we shall be happy, please God. Alas! I dare not tell you of the only thing that may hinder our meeting. But God loves us! So in a few days I shall be able to see my dear Pierrette in liberty, without a care, without any one hindering my looking at you, for I am very hungry to see you, O

Pierrette! Pierrette, who condescend to love me and to tell me so. Yes, Pierrette, I will be your lover, but only when I have earned the grand fortune you deserve, and till then I will be no more to you than a devoted servant whom you may command. Adieu.

'JACQUES BRIGAUT.'

This was what the young fellow did not tell Pierrette. He had written the following letter to Madame Lorrain at Nantes :—

'MADAME LORRAIN,—Your grand-daughter will die, killed by ill-usage, if you do not come to claim her back. I hardly knew her again ; and to enable you to judge for yourself of the state of things, I enclose in this letter one from Pierrette to me. You are reported here to have your grandchild's fortune, and you ought to justify yourself on this point. In short, if you can, come quickly ; we may yet be happy, and later you will find Pierrette dead.—I remain, with respect, your humble servant,

'JACQUES BRIGAUT.

'At Monsieur Frappier's, Master joiner, Grand' Rue, Provins.'

Brigaut only feared lest Pierrette's grandmother might be dead.

Though this letter from him, whom in her innocence she called her lover, was almost inexplicable to Pierrette, she accepted it with virgin faith. Her heart experienced the feeling which travellers in the desert know when they see from afar the palm grove round a well. In a few days her miseries would be ended, Brigaut said it ; she slept on the promise of her childhood's friend ; and yet, as she laid this letter with the former one, a dreadful thought found dreadful expression—

'Poor Brigaut,' said she to herself, 'he does not know the hole I have my feet in!'

Sylvie had heard Pierrette; she had also heard Brigaut below the window; she sprang up, rushed to look out on the Square through the shutter slats, and saw a man going away towards the house where the Colonel lived. In front of that Brigaut stopped. The old maid gently opened her door, went upstairs, was amazed at seeing a light in Pierrette's room, peeped through the keyhole, and could see nothing.

'Pierrette,' said she, 'are you ill?'

'No, cousin,' said Pierrette, startled.

'Then why have you a light in your room at midnight? Open your door. I must know what you are about.'

Pierrette, barefoot, opened the door, and Sylvie saw the skein of twine which Pierrette, never dreaming of being caught, had neglected to put away. Sylvie pounced upon it.

'What do you use that for?'

'Nothing, cousin.'

'Nothing?' said she. 'Very good. Lies again! You will not find that the way to heaven. Go to bed; you are cold.'

She asked no more, but disappeared, leaving Pierrette terror-stricken by such leniency. Instead of an outbreak, Sylvie had suddenly made up her mind to steal a march on the Colonel and Pierrette, to possess herself of the letters, and confound the couple who were deceiving her. Pierrette, inspired by danger, put the two letters inside her stays and covered them with calico.

This was the end of the loves of Pierrette and Brigaut.

Pierrette was glad of her friend's decision, for Sylvie's suspicions would be disconcerted by having nothing to feed on. And, in fact, Sylvie spent three nights out of her bed and three evenings in watching the innocent Colonel, without discovering anything in Pierrette's room,

or in the house or out of it, that hinted at their having any understanding. She sent Pierrette to confession, and took advantage of her absence to hunt through everything in the child's room as dexterously and as keenly as the spies and searchers at the gates of Paris. She found nothing. Her rage rose to the climax of human passion. If Pierrette had been present, she would certainly have beaten her without ruth. To a woman of this temper, jealousy was not so much a feeling as a possession; she breathed, she felt her heart beat, she had emotions in a way hitherto completely unknown to her; at the least movement she was on the alert, she listened to the faintest sounds, she watched Pierrette with gloomy concentration.

'That little wretch will be the death of me!' she would say.

Sylvie's severity to the child became at last the most refined cruelty, and aggravated the miserable state in which Pierrette lived. The poor little thing was constantly in a fever, and the pain in her head became intolerable. By the end of a week she displayed to the frequenters of the Rogrons' house a face of suffering which must certainly have softened any less cruel egotism; but Doctor Néraud, advised perhaps by Vinet, did not call for more than a week. The Colonel, suspected by Sylvie, was afraid she might break off their marriage if he showed the smallest anxiety about Pierrette; Bathilde accounted for her indisposition by simple causes, in no way dangerous.

At last, one Sunday evening, when the drawing-room was full of company, Pierrette could not endure the pain; she fainted completely away; and the Colonel, who was the first to observe that she had lost consciousness, lifted her up and carried her on to a sofa.

'She did it on purpose,' said Sylvie, looking at Mademoiselle Habert and the other players.

'Your cousin is very ill, I assure you,' said the Colonel.

'She was very well in your arms,' retorted Sylvie, with a hideous smile.

'The Colonel is right,' said Madame de Chargebœuf; 'you ought to send for a doctor. This morning in church every one was talking of Mademoiselle Lorrain's state as they came out—it is obvious.'

'I am dying,' said Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called to Sylvie to unfasten the girl's frock. Sylvie complied, saying, 'It is all a sham!'

She undid the dress, and was going to loosen the stays. Then Pierrette found superhuman strength; she sat up, and exclaimed, 'No, no; I will go to bed.'

Sylvie had touched her stays, and had felt the papers. She allowed Pierrette to escape, saying to everybody, 'Well, do you think she is so very ill? It is all put on; you could never imagine the naughtiness of that child.'

She detained Vinet at the end of the evening; she was furious, she was bent on revenge; she was rough with the Colonel as he bid her good-night. Gouraud shot a glance at Vinet that seemed to pierce him to the very bowels, and mark the spot for a bullet. Sylvie begged Vinet to remain. When they were alone, the old maid began—

'Never in my life, nor in all my days, will I marry the Colonel!'

'Now that you have made up your mind, I may speak. The Colonel is my friend; still, I am yours rather than his. Rogron has done me services I can never forget. I am as firm a friend as I am an implacable enemy. Certainly, when once I am in the Chamber you will see how I shall rise, and I will make Rogron a Receiver-General.—Well, swear to me never to repeat a word of our conversation!' Sylvie nodded assent. 'In the first place, our gallant Colonel is an inveterate gambler.'

'Indeed!' said Sylvie.

'But for the difficulties this passion has got him into, he might perhaps have been a Marshal of France,' the

lawyer went on. 'So he might squander all your fortune. But he is a deep customer. Do not believe that married people have or have not children, and you know what will happen to you. No. If you wish to marry, wait till I am in the Chamber, and then you can marry old Desfondrilles, who will be President of the Court here. To revenge yourself, make your brother marry Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf; I will undertake to get her consent; she will have two thousand francs a year, and you will be as nearly connected with the Chargebœufs as I am. Take my word for it, the Chargebœufs will call us cousins some day.'

'Gouraud is in love with Pierrette,' replied Sylvie.

'He is quite capable of it,' said Vinet; 'and quite capable of marrying her after your death.'

'A pretty little scheme!' said she.

'I tell you, he is as cunning as the devil. Make your brother marry, and announce that you intend to remain unmarried and leave your money to your nephews or nieces; you will thus hit Pierrette and Gouraud by the same blow, and you will see how foolish he will look.'

'To be sure,' cried the old maid; 'I can catch them. She shall go into a shop, and will have nothing. She has not a penny. Let her do as we did, and work.'

Vinet having got his idea into Sylvie's head, and knowing her obstinacy, left the house. The old maid ended by thinking that the plan was her own.

Vinet found the Colonel outside, smoking a cigar while he waited for him.

'Hold hard!' said the Colonel. 'You have pulled me to pieces, but there are stones enough in the ruins to bury you.'

'Colonel!'

'There is no "Colonel" in the case. I am going to lead you a dance. In the first place, you will never be deputy——'

'Colonel!'

'I can command ten votes, and the election depends on——'

'Colonel, just listen to me. Is there no one in the world but old Sylvie? I have just been trying to clear you. You are accused and proved guilty of writing to Pierrette; she has seen you coming out of your house at midnight to stand below the girl's window——'

'Well imagined!'

'She means her brother to marry Bathilde, and will keep her fortune for their children.'

'Will Rogron have any?'

'Yes,' said Vinet. 'But I promise to find you a young and agreeable woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs.—Are you mad? Can you and I afford to quarrel? Things have turned against you in spite of me; but you do not know me.'

'Well, we must learn to know each other,' replied the Colonel. 'Get me a wife with fifty thousand crowns before the elections—otherwise, your servant. I do not like awkward bed-fellows, and you have pulled all the blankets to your side. Good-night.'

'You will see,' said Vinet, shaking hands affectionately with the Colonel.

At about one in the morning three clear, low hoots, like those of an owl, admirably mimicked, sounded in the Place; Pierrette heard them in her fevered sleep. She got up, quite damp, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and threw out a ball of silk, to which he tied a letter.

Sylvie, excited by the events of the evening and her own deliberations, was not asleep; she was taken in by the owl's cry.

'Ah! what a bird of ill-omen!—But, hark! Pierrette is out of bed. What does she want?'

On hearing the attic window open, Sylvie rushed to her own window and heard Brigaut's paper rustle against the shutters. She tied her jacket strings, and

nimbly mounted the stairs to Pierrette's room; she found her untying the silk from round the letter.

'So I have caught you!' cried the old maid, going to the window, whence she saw Brigaut take to his heels. 'Give me that letter.'

'No, cousin,' said the girl, who, by one of the stupendous inspirations of youth, and sustained by her spirit, rose to the dignity of resistance which we admire in the history of some nations reduced to desperation.

'What, you will not?' cried Sylvie, advancing on her cousin, and showing her a hideous face full of hatred, and distorted by rage.

Pierrette drew back a step or two to have time to clutch her letter in her hand, which she kept shut with invincible strength. On seeing this, Sylvie seized Pierrette's delicate white hand in her lobster's claws, and tried to wrench it open. It was a fearful struggle, an infamous struggle, as everything is that dares to attack thought, the only treasure that God has set beyond the reach of power, and keeps as a secret bond between the wretched and Himself.

The two women, one dying, the other full of vigour, looked steadfastly at each other. Pierrette's eyes flashed at her torturer such a look as the Templar's who received on his breast the blows from a mace in the presence of Philippe le Bel. The King could not endure that fearful gleam, and retired appalled by it; Sylvie, a woman, and a jealous woman, answered that magnetic glance by an ominous glare. Awful silence reigned. The Bretonne's clenched fingers resisted her cousin's efforts with the tenacity of a steel vice. Sylvie wrung Pierrette's arm, and tried to open her hand; as this had no effect, she vainly set her nails in the flesh. Finally, madness reinforced her anger; she raised Pierrette's fist to her teeth to bite her fingers and subdue her by pain. Pierrette still defied her with the terrifying gaze of innocence. The old maid's fury was roused to such a pitch that she was

blind to all else; gripping Pierrette's arm, she beat the girl's fist on the window-sill, and on the marble chimney-piece, as we beat a nut to crack it and get at the kernel.

'Help, help!' cried Pierrette; 'I am being killed.'

'So you scream, do you, when I find you with a lover in the middle of the night?'

And she hit again and again without mercy.

'Help, help!' cried Pierrette, whose fist was bleeding.

At this moment there were violent blows on the street door. Both equally exhausted, the two women ceased.

Rogron, aroused and anxious, not knowing what was happening, had got out of bed, gone to his sister's room, and not found her; then he was alarmed, went down and opened the door, and was almost upset by Brigaut, followed by what seemed a phantom.

At the same instant Sylvie's eyes fell on Pierrette's stays; she remembered having felt the papers in them; she threw herself on them like a tiger on his prey, twisted the stays round her hand, and held them up with a smile, as an Iroquois smiles at his foe before scalping him.

'I am dying——' said Pierrette, dropping on her knees. 'Who will save me?'

'I will,' cried a woman with white hair, turning on Pierrette an aged, parchment face in which a pair of grey eyes sparkled.

'Ah, grandmother, you have come too late!' cried the poor child, melting into tears.

Pierrette went to fall on her bed, bereft of all her strength, and half killed by the reaction, which in a sick girl was inevitable after such a violent struggle. The tall withered apparition took her in her arms as a nurse takes a child, and went out, followed by Brigaut, without saying a word to Sylvie, at whom, by a tragic glance, she hurled majestic accusation. The sight of this dignified old woman in her Breton costume, shrouded in her

coiffe, which is a sort of long cloak made of black cloth, and accompanied by the terrible Brigaut, appalled Sylvie: she felt as if she had seen death.

She went downstairs, heard the door shut, and found herself face to face with her brother, who said to her, 'They have not killed you then?'

'Go to bed,' said Sylvie. 'To-morrow morning we will see what is to be done.'

She got into bed again, unpicked the stays, and read Brigaut's two letters, which utterly confounded her. She went to sleep in the strangest perplexity, never dreaming of the terrible legal action to which her conduct was to give rise.

Brigaut's letter to the widow Lorrain had found her in the greatest joy, which was chequered when she read it. The poor old woman, now past seventy, had been dying of grief at having to live without Pierrette at her side; she only comforted herself for her loss by the belief that she had sacrificed herself to her grandchild's interests. She had one of those ever-young hearts to which self-sacrifice gives strength and vitality. Her old husband, whose only joy Pierrette had been, had grieved for the child; day after day he had looked for her and missed her. It was an old man's sorrow; the sorrow old men live on, and die of at last.

Everybody can therefore imagine the joy felt by this poor woman, shut up in an almshouse, on hearing of one of those actions which, though rare, still are heard of in France.

After his failure François Joseph Collinet, the head of the house of Collinet, sailed for America with his children. He was a man of too much good feeling to sit down at Nantes, ruined and bereft of credit, in the midst of the disasters caused by his bankruptcy. From 1814 till 1824 this brave merchant, helped by his children and by his cashier, who remained faithful to him and lent him the

money to start again, valiantly worked to make a second fortune. After incredible efforts, that were crowned by success, by the eleventh year he was able to return to Nantes and rehabilitate himself, leaving his eldest son at the head of the American house. He found Madame Lorrain of Pen-Hoël at Saint-Jacques, and beheld the resignation with which the most hapless of his fellow-victims endured her penury.

'God forgive you!' said the old woman, 'since you give me on the brink of the grave the means of securing my grandchild's happiness. I, alas! can never see my poor old man's credit re-established.'

Monsieur Collinet had brought to his creditor her capital and interest at trade rates, altogether about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, active, wealthy, and capable men, had kept themselves above water, while the Lorrains' overthrow had seemed to old Collinet irremediable; he had now promised the widow that he would rehabilitate her husband's good name, finding that it would involve an expenditure of only about forty thousand francs more. When this act of generous restitution became known on 'change at Nantes, the authorities were eager to re-open its doors to Collinet before he had surrendered to the Court at Rennes; but the merchant declined the honour, and submitted to all the rigour of the Commercial Code.

Madame Lorrain, then, had received forty-two thousand francs the day before the post brought her Brigaut's letters. As she signed her receipt, her first words were—

'Now I can live with my Pierrette, and let her marry poor Brigaut, who will make a fortune out of my money!'

She could not sit still; she fussed and fidgeted, and wanted to set out for Provins. And when she had read the fatal letters, she rushed out into the town like a mad thing, asking how she could get to Provins with the swiftness of lightning. She set out by mail when she heard of the

Governmental rapidity of that conveyance. From Paris she took the Troyes coach; she had arrived at eleven that evening at Frappier's, where Brigaut, seeing the old Bretonne's deep despair, at once promised to fetch her grand-daughter, after describing Pierrette's state in a few words. Those few words so alarmed the old woman that she could not control her impatience; she ran out to the Square. When Pierrette screamed, her grandmother's heart was pierced by the cry as keenly as was Brigaut's. The two together would no doubt have roused all the inhabitants, if Rogron, in sheer terror, had not opened the door. This cry of a girl in extremity filled the old woman with strength as great as her horror; she carried her dear Pierrette all the way to Frappier's, where his wife had hastily arranged Brigaut's room for Pierrette's grandmother. So in this miserable lodging, on a bed scarcely made, they laid the poor child; she fainted away, still keeping her hand closed, bruised and bleeding as it was, her nails set in the flesh. Brigaut, Frappier, his wife, and the old woman contemplated Pierrette in silence, all lost in unutterable astonishment.

'Why is her hand covered with blood?' was the grandmother's first question.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep which follows such an extreme exertion of strength, and knowing that she was safe from any violence, relaxed her fingers. Brigaut's letter fell out as an answer.

'They wanted to get my letter,' said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the note he had written, desiring his little friend to steal softly out of the Rogrons' house. He piously kissed the little martyr's hand.

Then there was a thing which made the joiners shudder: it was the sight of old Madame Lorrain, a sublime spectre, standing by her child's bedside. Horror and vengeance fired with fierce expression the myriad wrinkles that furrowed her skin of ivory yellow; on her brow, shaded by thin grey locks, sat divine wrath.

With the powerful intuition granted to the aged as they approach the tomb, she read all Pierrette's life, of which indeed she had been thinking all the way she had come.

She understood the malady that threatened the life of her darling. Two large tears gathered painfully in her grey-and-white eyes, which sorrow had robbed of lashes and eyebrows; two beads of grief that gave a fearful moisture to those eyes, and swelled and rolled over those withered cheeks without wetting them.

'They have killed her!' she said at last, clasping her hands.

She dropped on her knees, which hit two sharp blows on the floor; she was making a vow, no doubt, to Sainte-Anne d'Auray, the most powerful Madonna of Brittany.

'A doctor from Paris,' she next said to Brigaut. 'Fly there, Brigaut. Go!'

She took the artisan by the shoulders and turned him round with a despotic gesture.

'I was coming at any rate, my good Brigaut,' she said, calling him back. 'I am rich.—Here!' She untied the ribbon that fastened her bodice across her bosom, took out a paper, in which were wrapped forty-two bank-notes, and said, 'Take as much as you need; bring back the greatest doctor in Paris.'

'Keep that,' said Frappier; 'he could not change a bank-note at this hour. I have money; the diligence will pass presently, he will be sure to find a place in it. But would it not be better first to consult Monsieur Martener, who will give us the name of a Paris physician? The diligence is not due for an hour; we have plenty of time.'

Brigaut went off to rouse Monsieur Martener. He brought the doctor back with him, not a little surprised to find Mademoiselle Lorrain at Frappier's. Brigaut described to him the scene that had just taken place at the Rogrons'. The loquacity of a despairing lover threw light on this domestic drama, though the doctor could

not suspect its horrors or its extent. Martener gave Brigaut the address of the famous Horace Bianchon, and Jacques and his master left the room on hearing the approach of the diligence.

Monsieur Martener sat down, and began by examining the bruises and wounds on the girl's hand, which hung out of bed.

'She did not hurt herself in such a way,' said he.

'No, the dreadful creature I was so unhappy as to trust her with was torturing her,' said the grandmother. 'My poor Pierrette was crying out, "Help! Murder!" It was enough to touch the heart of an executioner.'

'But why?' said the doctor, feeling Pierrette's pulse. 'She is very ill,' he went on, bringing the light close to the bed. 'We shall hardly save her,' said he, after looking at her face. 'She must have suffered terribly, and I cannot understand their having left her without care.'

'It is my intention,' said the old woman, 'to appeal to justice. Had these people, who wrote to ask me for my grand-daughter, saying that they had twelve thousand francs a year, any right to make her their cook and give her work far beyond her strength?'

'They did not choose to see that she was obviously suffering from one of the ailments to which young girls are sometimes subject, and needed the greatest care!' cried Monsieur Martener.

Pierrette was roused, partly by the light held by Madame Frappier so as to show her face more clearly, and partly by the dreadful pain in her head, caused by reactionary collapse after her struggle.

'Oh, Monsieur Martener, I am very ill,' said she, in her pretty voice.

'Where is the pain, my child?' said the doctor.

'There,' she replied, pointing to a spot on her head above the left ear.

'There is an abscess!' cried the doctor, after feeling Pierrette's head for some time, and questioning her as

to the pain. 'You must tell us everything, my dear, to enable us to cure you. Why is your hand in this state? You did not injure it like this yourself.'

Pierrette artlessly told the tale of her struggle with her cousin Sylvie.

'Make her talk to you,' said the doctor to her grandmother, 'and learn all about it. I will wait till the surgeon arrives from Paris, and we will call in the head surgeon of the hospital for a consultation. It seems to me very serious. I will send a soothing draught to give Mademoiselle some sleep. She needs rest.'

The old Bretonne, left alone with her grandchild, made her tell everything, by exerting her influence over her, and explaining to her that she was rich enough for all three, so that Brigaut need never leave them. The poor child confessed all her sufferings, never dreaming of the lawsuit she was leading up to. The monstrous conduct of these two loveless beings, who knew nothing of family affection, revealed to the old woman worlds of torment, as far from her conception as the manners of the savage tribes must have been to the first travellers who penetrated the savannahs of America.

Her grandmother's presence, and the certainty of living with her for the future in perfect ease, lulled Pierrette's mind as the draught lulled her body. The old woman watched by her, kissing her brow, hair, and hands, as the holy women may have kissed Jesus while laying Him in the sepulchre.

By nine in the morning Monsieur Martener went to the President of the Courts, and related to him the scene of the past night between Sylvie and Pierrette, the moral and physical torture, the cruelty of every kind inflicted by the Rogrons on their ward, and the two fatal maladies which had been developed by this ill-usage. The President sent for the notary, Monsieur Auffray, a connection of Pierrette's on her mother's side.

At this moment the war between the Vinet party and the Tiphaine party was at its height. The gossip circulated in Provins by the Rogrons and their adherents as to the well-known *liaison* between Madame Roguin and du Tillet the banker, and the circumstances of Monsieur Roguin's bankruptcy—Madame Tiphaine's father was said to have committed forgery—hit all the more surely because, though it was scandal, it was not calumny. Such wounds pierced to the bottom of things; they attacked self-interest in its most vital part. These statements, repeated to the partisans of Tiphaine by the same speakers who also reported to the Rogrons all the sarcasms uttered by the 'beautiful Madame Tiphaine' and her friends, added fuel to their hatred, complicated as it was with political feeling.

The irritation caused in France at that time by party spirit, which had waxed excessively violent, was everywhere bound up, as it was at Provins, with imperilled interests and offended and antagonistic private feelings. Each coterie eagerly pounced on anything that might damage its rival. Party animosity was not less implicated than personal conceit in even trivial questions, which were often carried to great lengths. A whole town threw itself into some dispute, raising it to the dignity of a political contest. And so the President discerned, in the action between Pierrette and the Rogrons, a means of confuting, descrediting, and humiliating the owners of that drawing-room where plots were hatched against the monarchy, and where the Opposition newspaper had had its birth.

He sent for the public prosecutor. Then Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur Auffray the notary—appointed the legal guardian of Pierrette—and the President of the Court discussed in the greatest privacy, with Monsieur Martener, what steps could be taken. The legal guardian was to call a family council (a formality of French law), and, armed with the evidence of the three

medical men, would demand the dismissal of Rogron from his guardianship. The case thus formulated would be brought before the tribunal, and then Monsieur Lesourd would get it carried into the Criminal Court by demanding an inquiry.

By mid-day all Provins was in a stir over the strange reports of what had taken place at the Rogrons' in the course of the past night. Pierrette's screams had been remotely heard in the Square, but they had not lasted long; no one had got up; but everybody had asked in the morning, 'Did you hear the noise and screaming at about one o'clock? What was it?' Gossip and comment had given such magnitude to the horrible drama that a crowd collected in front of Frappier's shop, everybody cross-questioning the honest joiner, who described the girl's arrival at his house with her hand bleeding and her fingers mangled.

At about one in the afternoon a post-chaise, containing Doctor Bianchon, by whom sat Brigaut, stopped at Frappier's door, and Madame Frappier went off to the hospital to fetch Monsieur Martener and the head surgeon. Thus the reports heard in the town received confirmation.

The Rogrons were accused of having intentionally maltreated their young cousin, and endangered her life. The news reached Vinet at the Law Courts; he left his business and hurried to the Rogrons'. Rogron and his sister had just finished breakfast. Sylvie had avoided telling her brother of her defeat during the night; she allowed him to question her, making no reply but: 'It does not concern you.' And she bustled to and fro between the kitchen and dining-room to avoid all discussion.

She was alone when Vinet walked in.

'Do you know nothing of what is going on?' asked the lawyer.

'No,' said Sylvie.

'You are going to have a criminal action brought against you for the way in which matters stand with Pierrette.'

'A criminal action!' said Rogron, coming in. 'Why? What for?'

'In the first place,' said Vinet, looking at Sylvie, 'tell me exactly, without subterfuge, all that took place last night, as though you were before God, for there is some talk of cutting off Pierrette's hand.'

Sylvie turned ashy pale and shivered.

'Then there was something!' said the lawyer.

Mademoiselle Rogron told the story, trying to justify herself; but on being cross-questioned, related all the details of the horrible conflict.

'If you have only broken her fingers, you will only appear in the Police Court; but if her hand has to be amputated, you will find yourself brought up at the Assizes. The Tiphaines will do anything to get you there.'

Sylvie, more dead than alive, confessed her jealousy, and, which was even harder to bring out, how her suspicions had blundered.

'What a case for trial!' exclaimed Vinet. 'You and your brother may be ruined by it; you will be thrown over by many of your friends even if you gain it. If you do not come out clear, you will have to leave Provins.'

'Oh! my dear Monsieur Vinet—you who are such an able lawyer,' cried Rogron, horrified, 'advise us, save us!'

Vinet dexterously fomented the fears of these two fools to the utmost, and declared positively that Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf would hesitate to go to their house again. To be forsaken by these two ladies would be a fatal condemnation. In short, after an hour of magnificent manœuvring, it was agreed that in order to induce Vinet to save the Rogrons, he must have an interest at stake in defending him in the eyes

of all Provins. In the course of the evening Rogron's engagement to marry Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf was to be announced. The banns were to be published on Sunday. The marriage-contract would at once be drawn up by Cournant, and Mademoiselle Rogron would figure in it as abandoning, in consideration of this alliance, the capital of her share of the estate by a deed of gift to her brother, reserving only a life-interest. Vinet impressed on Rogron and his sister the necessity of having a draft of this deed drawn up two or three days before that event, so as to put Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf under the necessity, in public opinion, of continuing their visits to the Rogrons.

'Sign that contract, and I will undertake to get you out of the scrape,' said the lawyer. 'It will no doubt be a hard fight, but I will go into it body and soul, and you will owe me a very handsome taper.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Rogron.

By half-past eleven the lawyer was empowered to act for them, alike as to the contract and as to the management of the case. At noon the President was informed that a summons was applied for by Vinet against Brigaut and the widow Lorrain for abducting Pierrette Lorrain, a minor, from the domicile of her guardian. Thus the audacious Vinet took up the offensive, putting Rogron in the position of a man having the law on his side. This, indeed, was the tone in which the matter was commented on in the Law Courts. The President postponed hearing the parties till four o'clock. The excitement of the town over all these events need not be described. The President knew that the medical consultation would be ended by three o'clock; he wished that the legal guardian should appear armed with the physicians' verdict.

The announcement of Rogron's engagement to the fair Bathilde de Chargebœuf, and of the deed of gift added by Sylvie to the contract, promptly made the

Rogrons two enemies—Mademoiselle Habert and the Colonel, who thus saw all their hopes dashed. Céleste Habert and the Colonel remained ostensibly friends to the Rogrons, but only to damage them more effectually. So, as soon as Monsieur Martener spoke of the existence of an abscess on the brain in the haberdashers' hapless victim, Céleste and the Colonel mentioned the blow Pierrette had given herself that evening when Sylvie had driven her out of the room, and remembered Mademoiselle Rogron's cruel and barbarous remarks. They related various instances of the old maid's utter indifference to her ward's sufferings. Thus these friends of the couple admitted serious wrong, while affecting to defend Sylvie and her brother.

Vinet had foreseen this storm; but Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf was about to acquire the whole of the Rogrons' fortune, and he promised himself that in a few weeks he should see her living in the nice house on the Place, and reign conjointly with her over Provins; for he was already scheming for a coalition with the Bréauteys to serve his own ambitions.

From twelve o'clock till four all the ladies of the Tiphaine faction—the Garcelands, the Guépins, the Julliards, Mesdames Galardon, Guénée, and the sous-préfet's wife—all sent to inquire after Mademoiselle Lorrain. Pierrette knew nothing whatever of this commotion in the town on her behalf. In the midst of acute suffering she felt ineffably happy at finding herself between her grandmother and Brigaut, the objects of her affection. Brigaut's eyes were constantly full of tears, and the old woman petted her beloved grandchild.

God knows the grandmother spared the three men of science none of the details she had heard from Pierrette about her life with the Rogrons! Horace Bianchon expressed his indignation in unmeasured terms. Horrified by such barbarity, he insisted that the other doctors of the town should be called in; so Monsieur Néraud was

present, and was requested, as being Rogron's friend, to contradict if he could the terrible inferences derived from the consultation, which, unfortunately for Rogron, were unanimously subscribed to. Néraud, who was already credited with having made Pierrette's maternal grandmother die of grief, was in a false position, of which Martener adroitly took advantage, delighted to overwhelm the Rogrons, and also to compromise Monsieur Néraud, his antagonist. It is needless to give the text of this document, which also was produced at the trial. If the medical terms of Molière's age were barbarous, those of modern medicine have the advantage of such extreme plain speaking, that an account of Pierrette's maladies, though natural, and unfortunately common, would shock the ear. The verdict was indisputably final, attested by so famous a name as that of Horace Bianchon.

After the Court sitting was over, the President remained in his place, while Pierrette's grandmother came in with Monsieur Auffray, Brigaut, and a considerable crowd. Vinet appeared alone. This contrast struck the spectators, including a vast number of merely inquisitive persons. Vinet, who had kept his gown on, raised his hard face to the President, settling his spectacles as he began in his harsh, sawing tones to set forth that certain strangers had made their way into the house of Monsieur and Mademoiselle Rogron by night, and had carried away the girl Lorrain, a minor. Her guardian claimed the protection of the Court to recover his ward.

Monsieur Auffray, as the guardian appointed by the Court, rose to speak.

'If Monsieur le Président,' said he, 'will take into his consideration this consultation, signed by one of the most eminent Paris physicians, and by all the doctors and surgeons of Provins, he will perceive how unreasonable is Monsieur Rogron's claim, and what sufficient reasons induced the minor's grandmother to release her at once from her tormentors. The facts are these: A deliberate

consultation, signed unanimously by a celebrated Paris doctor, sent for in great haste, and by all the medical authorities of the town, ascribe the almost dying state of the ward to the ill-treatment she had received at the hands of the said Rogron and his sister. As a legal formality a family council will be held, with the least possible delay, and consulted on the question whether the guardian ought not to be held disqualified for his office. We petition that the minor shall not be sent back to her guardian's house, but shall be placed in the hands of any other member of the family whom Monsieur le Président may see fit to designate.'

Vinet wanted to reply, saying that the document of the consultation ought to be communicated to him that he might contravene it.

'Certainly not to Vinet's side,' said the President severely, 'but perhaps to the public prosecutor. The case is closed.'

At the foot of the petition the President wrote the following injunction :—

'Inasmuch as that by a consultation unanimously signed by the medical faculty of this town and by Doctor Bianchon of the medical faculty of Paris, it is proved that the girl Lorrain, a minor, claimed by her guardian Rogron, is in a very serious state of sickness brought on by the ill-usage and cruelty inflicted on her in the house of her guardian and his sister,

'We, President of the Lower Court of Justice at Provins,

'Decree on the petition, and enjoin that until the family council shall have been held which, as the provisional guardian appointed by the law declares, is at once to be convened, the said minor shall not re-enter her guardian's residence, but shall be transferred to that of the guardian appointed by the law.

'And in the second place, in consideration of the minor's present state of health, and the traces of violence

which, in the opinion of the medical men, are to be seen on her person, we commission the chief physician and chief surgeon of the Hospital of Provins to attend her; and in the event of the cruelty being proved to have been constant, we reserve all the rights and powers of the law, without prejudice to the civil action taken by Auffray, the legalised temporary guardian.'

This terrible injunction was pronounced by Monsieur le Président Tiphaine with a loud voice and distinct utterance.

'Why not the hulks at once?' said Vinet. 'And all this fuss about a little girl who carried on an intrigue with a carpenter's apprentice! If this is the way the case is conducted,' he added insolently, 'we shall apply for other judgment on the plea of legitimate suspicions.'

Vinet left the Court, and went to the chief leaders of his party to explain the position of Rogron, who had never given his little cousin a finger-flip, and whom the tribunal had treated, he declared, less as Pierrette's guardian than as the chief voter in Provins.

To hear him, the Tiphaines were making much ado about nothing. The mountain would bring forth a mouse. Sylvie, an eminently religious and well-conducted person, had detected an intrigue between her brother's ward and a carpenter's boy, a Breton named Brigaut. The young rascal knew very well that the girl would have a fortune from her grandmother, and wanted to tamper with her. . . . Vinet to talk of tampering! . . . Mademoiselle Rogron, who had kept the letters in which this little slut's wickedness was made clear, was not so much to blame as the Tiphaines tried to make her seem. Even if she had been betrayed into violence to obtain a letter, which could easily be accounted for by the irritation produced in her by Breton obstinacy, in what was Rogron to blame?

The lawyer thus made the action a party matter, and contrived to give it political colour. And so, from that

evening, there were differences of opinion on the question.

'If you hear but one bell, you hear but one note,' said the wise-heads. 'Have you heard what Vinet has to say? He explains the case very well.'

Frappier's house was regarded as unsuitable for Pierrette on account of the noise, which would cause her much pain in the head. Her removal from thence to her appointed guardian's house was as desirable from a medical as from a legal point of view. This business was effected with the utmost care, and calculated to make a great sensation. Pierrette was placed on a stretcher with many mattresses, carried by two men, escorted by a Grey Sister holding in her hand a bottle of ether, followed by her grandmother, Brigaut, Madame Auffray, and her maid. The people stood at the windows and in the doors to see the little procession pass. No doubt the state in which Pierrette was seen and her death-like pallor gave immense support to the party adverse to the Rogrons. The Auffrays were bent on showing to all the town how right the President had been in pronouncing his injunction. Pierrette and her grandmother were established on the second floor of Monsieur Auffray's house. The notary and his wife lavished on them the generosity of the amplest hospitality; they made a display of it. Pierrette was nursed by her grandmother, and Monsieur Martener came to see her again the same evening, with the surgeon.

From that evening dated much exaggeration on both sides. The Rogrons' room was crowded. Vinet had worked up the Liberal faction in the matter. The two Chargebœuf ladies dined with the Rogrons, for the marriage-contract was to be signed forthwith. Vinet had had the banns put up at the Mairie that morning. He treated the business of Pierrette as a mere trifle. If the Court of Provins could not judge it dispassionately,

the superior Court would judge of the facts, said he, and the Auffrays would think twice before rushing into such an action. Then the connection between the Rogrons and the Chargebœufs was of immense weight with certain people. To them the Rogrons were as white as snow, and Pierrette an excessively wicked little girl whom they had cherished in their bosom.

In Madame Tiphaine's drawing-room vengeance was taken on the horrible scandals the Vinet party had promulgated for the last two years. The Rogrons were monsters, and the guardian would find himself in the Criminal Court. In the Square, Pierrette was perfectly well; in the upper town, she must infallibly die; at the Rogrons', she had a few scratches on her hand; at Madame Tiphaine's, she had her fingers smashed; one would have to be cut off.

Next day the *Courrier de Provins* had an extremely clever article, well written, a masterpiece of innuendo mixed up with legal demurs, which placed the Rogrons above suspicion. The *Ruche*, which came out two days later, could not reply without risk of libel; but it said that in a case like the present, the best thing was to leave justice to take its course.

The family council was constituted by the Justice of the Peace of the Provins district, as the legal President, in the first place, of Rogron and the two Auffrays, Pierrette's next-of-kin; then of Monsieur Ciprey, a nephew of Pierrette's maternal grandmother. He added to these Monsieur Habert, the young girl's director, and Colonel Gouraud, who had always given himself out to be a comrade of her father's, Colonel Lorrain. The Justice's impartiality was highly applauded in including in this family council Monsieur Habert and the Colonel, whom all the town regarded as great friends of the Rogrons. In the difficult position in which he found himself, Rogron begged to be allowed the support of Maître Vinet on the occasion. By this manœuvre,

evidently suggested by Vinet, he succeeded in postponing the meeting of the family council till the end of December.

At that date the President and his wife were in Paris, living with Madame Roguin, in consequence of the sitting of the Chambers. Thus the Ministerial party at Provins was bereft of its head. Vinet had already quietly made friends with the worthy examining judge, Monsieur Desfondrilles, in case the business should assume the penal or criminal aspect that Tiphaine had endeavoured to give it.

For three hours Vinet addressed the family council; he proved an intrigue between Brigaut and Pierrette, to justify Mademoiselle Rogron's severity; he pointed out how natural it was that the guardian should have left his ward under the control of a woman; he dwelt on his client's non-interference in the mode of Pierrette's education as conducted by Sylvie. But in spite of Vinet's efforts, the meeting unanimously decided on abolishing Rogron's guardianship. Monsieur Auffray was appointed Pierrette's guardian, and Monsieur Ciprey her legal guardian.

They heard the evidence given by Adèle the maid, who incriminated her former master and mistress; by Mademoiselle Habert, who repeated Sylvie's cruel remarks the evening when Pierrette had given herself the dreadful blow that everybody had heard, and the comments on Pierrette's health made by Madame de Chargebœuf. Brigaut produced the letter he had received from Pierrette, which established their innocence. It was proved that the deplorable state in which the minor now was resulted from the neglect of her guardian, who was responsible in all that related to his ward. Pierrette's illness had struck everybody, even persons in the town who did not know the family. Thus the charge of cruelty against Rogron was fully sustained. The matter would be made public.

By Vinet's advice Rogron put in a protest against the confirmation by the Court of the decision of the family council. The Minister of Justice now intervened, in consequence of the increasingly critical condition of Pierrette Lorrain. This singular case, though put on the lists forthwith, did not come up for trial till near the month of March 1828.

By that time the marriage of Rogron to Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf was an accomplished fact. Sylvie was living on the second floor of the house, which had been arranged to accommodate her and Madame de Chargebœuf; for the first floor was entirely given up to Madame Rogron. The beautiful Madame Rogron now succeeded to the beautiful Madame Tiphaine. The effect of this marriage was enormous. The town no longer came to Mademoiselle Sylvie's salon, but to the beautiful Madame Rogron's.

Monsieur Tiphaine, the President of the Provins Court, pushed by his mother-in-law, and supported by du Tillet and by Nucingen, the Royalist bankers, found an opportunity of being useful to the Ministry. He was one of the most highly respected speakers of the Centre, was made a judge of the Lower Court in the Seine district, and got his nephew Lesourd nominated President in his place at Provins. This appointment greatly annoyed Monsieur Desfondrilles, still an archæologist, and more supernumerary than ever. The Keeper of the Seals sent a protégé of his own to fill Lesourd's place. Thus Monsieur Tiphaine's promotion did not lead to any advancement in the legal forces at Provins.

Vinet took advantage of these circumstances very cleverly. He had always told the good folks of Provins that they were only serving as a step-ladder to Madame Tiphaine's cunning and ambition. The President laughed in his sleeve at his friends. Madame Tiphaine secretly disdained the town of Provins; she would never come back to it.

Monsieur Tiphaine *père* presently died; his son inherited the estate of le Fay, and sold his handsome house in the upper town to Monsieur Julliard. This sale showed how little he intended to come back to Provins. Vinet was right! Vinet had been a true prophet! These facts had no little influence on the action relating to Rogron's guardianship.

The horrible martyrdom so brutally inflicted on Pierrette by two imbecile tyrants—which led, medically speaking, to her being subjected by Monsieur Martener, with Bianchon's approval, to the terrible operation of trepanning; the whole dreadful drama, reduced to judicial statements, was left among the foul medley known to lawyers as outstanding cases. The action dragged on through the delays and inextricable intricacies of 'proceedings,' constantly checked by the quibbles of a contemptible lawyer, while the culumniated Pierrette languished in suffering from the most terrible pains known to medical science. We could not avoid these details as to the strange variations in public opinion and the slow march of justice, before returning to the room where she was living—where she was dying.

Monsieur Martener and the whole of the Auffray family were in a very few days completely won by Pierrette's adorable temper, and by the old Bretonne, whose feelings, ideas, and manners bore the stamp of an antique Roman type. This matron of the Marais was like one of Plutarch's women.

The doctor desired to contend with Death, at least, for his prey; for from the first the Paris and the provincial physicians had agreed in regarding Pierrette as past saving. Then began between the disease and the doctor, aided by Pierrette's youth, one of those struggles which medical men alone know; the reward, in the event of success, is neither in the pecuniary profit, nor even in the rescued sufferer; it lies in sweet satisfaction of conscience,

and in a sort of ideal and invisible palm of victory gathered by every true artist from the joyful certainty of having achieved a fine work. The physician makes for healing as the artist makes for the beautiful, urged on by a noble sentiment which we call virtue. This daily recurring battle had extinguished in this man, though a provincial, the squalid irritation of the warfare going on between the Vinet party and that of the Tiphaines, as happens with men who have to fight it out with great suffering.

Monsieur Martener had at first wished to practise his profession in Paris; but the activity of the great city, the callousness produced at last in a doctor's mind by the terrific number of sick people and the multitude of serious cases, had appalled his gentle soul, which was made for a country life. He was in bondage, too, to his pretty birthplace. So he had come back to Provins to marry and settle there, and take almost tender care of a population he could think of as a large family. All the time Pierrette was ill he could not bear to speak of her illness. His aversion to reply when every one asked for news of the poor child was so evident, that at last nobody questioned him about her. Pierrette was to him what she could not help being—one of those deep, mysterious poems, immense in its misery, such as occur in the terrible life of a physician. He had for this frail girl an admiration of which he would betray the secret to no one.

This feeling for his patient was infectious, as all true sentiments are; Monsieur and Madame Auffray's house, so long as Pierrette lived in it, was peaceful and still. Even the children, who of old had had such famous games with Pierrette, understood, with childlike grace, that they were not to be noisy or troublesome. They made it a point of honour to be good because Pierrette was ill.

Monsieur Auffray's house is in the upper town, below the ruined castle; built, indeed, on one of the cliff-like knolls formed by the overthrow of the old ramparts.

From thence the residents have a view over the valley as they walk in a little orchard supported by the thick walls rising straight up from the lower town. The roofs of the houses rise to the level of the wall that upholds this garden. Along this terrace is a walk ending at the glass-door of Monsieur Auffray's study. At the other end are a vine-covered arbour and a fig-tree, sheltering a round table, a bench, and some chairs, all painted green.

Pierrette had a room over that of her new guardian. Madame Lorrain slept there on a camp-bed by her grandchild's side. From her window Pierrette could see the beautiful valley of Provins, which she hardly knew—she had so rarely been out of the Rogrons' sinister dwelling. Whenever it was fine, she liked to drag herself, on her grandmother's arm, as far as this arbour. Brigaut, who now did no work, came three times a day to see his little friend; he was absorbed in grief, which made him indifferent to life; he watched for Monsieur Martener with the eagerness of a spaniel, always went in with him and came out with him.

It would be difficult to imagine all the follies every one was ready to commit for the dear little invalid. Her grandmother, drunk with grief, hid her despair; she showed the child the same smiling face as at Pen-Hoël. In her wish to delude herself, she made her a Breton cap such as Pierrette had worn when she came to Provins, and put it on her; the girl then looked to her more like herself; she was sweet to behold, with her face framed in the aureole of cambric edged with starched lace. Her face, as white as fine white porcelain, her forehead on which suffering set a semblance of deep thoughtfulness, the purity of outline refined by sickness, the slowness and occasional fixity of her gaze, all made Pierrette a master-work of melancholy.

The child was waited on with fanatical devotion; she was so tender, so loving. Madame Martener had sent her piano to Madame Auffray, her sister, thinking it

might amuse Pierrette, to whom music was rapture. It was a poem to watch her listening to a piece by Weber, Beethoven, or Hérold, her eyes raised to heaven in silence, regretting, no doubt, the life she felt slipping from her. Monsieur Péroux the curé and Monsieur Habert, her two priestly comforters, admired her pious resignation.

Is it not a strange fact, worthy of the attention alike of philosophers and of mere observers, that a sort of seraphic perfection is characteristic of youths and maidens marked amid the crowd with the red cross of death, like saplings in a forest? He who has witnessed such a death can never remain or become an infidel. These beings exhale, as it were, a heavenly fragrance, their looks speak of God, their voice is eloquent in the most trivial speech, and often sounds like a divine instrument, expressing the secrets of futurity. When Monsieur Martener congratulated Pierrette on having carried out some disagreeable prescription, this angel would say in the presence of all, and with what a look!—

'I wish to live, dear Monsieur Martener, less for my own sake than for my grandmother's, for my poor Brigaut's, and for you all, who will be sorry when I die.'

The first time she took a walk, in the month of November, under a bright Martinmas sun, escorted by all the family, Madame Auffray asked her if she were tired.

'Now that I have nothing to bear but the pain God sends me, I can endure it. I find strength to bear suffering in the joy of being loved.'

This was the only time she ever alluded, even so remotely, to her horrible martyrdom at the Rogrons'; she never spoke of them; and as the remembrance could not fail to be painful, no one mentioned their name.

'Dear Madame Auffray,' said she one day at noon on the terrace, while gazing at the valley lighted up by brilliant sunshine and dressed in the russet tints of

autumn, 'my dying days in your house will have brought me more happiness than all the three years before.'

Madame Auffray looked at her sister, Madame Martener, and said to her in a whisper—

'How she would have loved!'

And, indeed, Pierrette's tone and look gave her words unutterable meaning.

Monsieur Martener kept up a correspondence with Doctor Bianchon, and tried no serious treatment without his approbation. He hoped first to restore the girl to normal health, and then to enable the abscess to discharge itself through the ear. The more acute her pain was, the more hopeful he felt. With regard to the first point he had some success, and that was a great triumph. For some days Pierrette recovered her appetite, and could satisfy it with substantial food, for which her unhealthy state had hitherto given her great aversion; her colour improved, but the pain in her head was terrible. The doctor now begged the great physician, his consultee, to come to Provins. Bianchon came, stayed two days, and advised an operation; he threw himself into all poor Martener's anxiety, and went himself to fetch the famous Desplein. So the operation was performed by the greatest surgeon of ancient or modern times; but this terrible augur said to Martener as he went away with Bianchon, his best-beloved pupil—

'You can save her only by a miracle. As Horace has told you, necrosis has set in. At that age the bones are still so tender.'

The operation was performed early in March 1828. All that month Monsieur Martener, alarmed by the fearful torments Pierrette endured, made several journeys to Paris; he consulted Desplein and Bianchon, to whom he even suggested a treatment resembling that known as lithotrity—the insertion of a tubular instrument into the skull, by which a heroic remedy might be introduced to arrest the progress of decay. The daring Desplein dared

not attempt this surgical feat, which only despair had suggested to Martener.

When the doctor returned from his last journey to Paris, his friends thought him crestfallen and gloomy. One fatal evening he was compelled to announce to the Auffray family, to Madame Lorrain, to the confessor, and to Brigaut, who were all present, that science could do no more for Pierrette, that her life was in the hands of God alone. Her grandmother took a vow and begged the curé to say, every morning at daybreak, before Pierrette rose, a mass which she and Brigaut would attend.

The case came up for trial. While the Rogrons' victim lay dying, Vinet was calumniating her to the Court. The Court ratified the decision of the family council, and the lawyer immediately appealed. The newly appointed public prosecutor delivered an address which led to an inquiry. Rogron and his sister were obliged to find sureties to avoid being sent to prison. The inquiry necessitated the examination of Pierrette herself. When Monsieur Desfondrilles went to the Auffrays' house, Pierrette was actually dying; the priest was at her bedside, and she was about to take the last sacrament. At that moment she was entreating all the assembled family to forgive her cousins as she herself forgave them, saying, with excellent good sense, that judgment in such cases belonged to God alone.

'Grandmother,' said she, 'leave all you possess to Brigaut'—Brigaut melted into tears—'and,' Pierrette went on, 'give a thousand francs to good Adèle, who used to warm my bed on the sly. If she had stayed with my cousins, I should be alive . . .'

It was at three o'clock on Easter Tuesday, on a beautiful day, that this little angel ceased to suffer. Her heroical grandmother insisted on sitting by her all night with the priests, and sewing her winding-sheet on her with her old hands. Towards evening Brigaut left the house and went back to Frappier's.

'I need not ask you the news, my poor boy,' said the carpenter.

'Père Frappier—yes; it is all over with her, and not with me!'

The apprentice looked round the workshop at all the wood store with gloomy but keen eyes.

'I understand, Brigaut,' said the worthy Frappier. 'There—that is what you want,' and he pointed to some two-inch oak planks.

'Do not help me, Monsieur Frappier,' said the Breton. 'I will do it all myself.'

Brigaut spent the night in planing and joining Pierrette's coffin, and more than once he ripped off with one stroke a long shaving wet with his tears. His friend Frappier smoked and watched him. He said nothing to him but these few words when his man put the four sides together—

'Make the lid to slide in a groove, then her poor friends will not hear you nail it down.'

At daybreak Brigaut went for lead to line the coffin. By a singular coincidence the sheets of lead cost exactly the sum he had given to Pierrette for her journey from Nantes to Provins. The brave Breton, who had borne up under the dreadful pain of making a coffin for the beloved companion of his childhood, overlaying each funereal board with all his memories, could not endure this coincidence; he turned faint, and could not carry the lead; the plumber accompanied him, and offered to go with him and solder down the top sheet as soon as the body should be laid in the coffin.

The Breton burned his plane and all the tools he had used for the work, he wound up his accounts with Frappier, and bade him good-bye.

The heroism which enabled the poor fellow, like the grandmother, to busy himself with doing the last services to the dead, led to his intervening in the crowning scene which put a climax to the Rogrons' tyranny.

Brigaut and the plumber arrived at Monsieur Auffray's just in time to decide by brute force a horrible and shameful legal question. The chamber of the dead was full of people, and presented a strange scene to the two workmen. The Rogrons stood hideous by the victim's corpse to torture it even in death. The body of the poor girl, sublime in its beauty, lay on her grandmother's camp-bed. Pierrette's eyes were closed, her hair smoothly braided, her body sewn into a winding-sheet of coarse cotton.

By this bed, her hair in disorder, on her knees with outstretched hands and a flaming face, old Madame Lorrain was crying out—

'No, no; it shall never be!'

At the foot of the bed were the guardian Monsieur Auffray, the Curé Monsieur Péroux, and Monsieur Habert. Tapers were still burning. Opposite the grandmother stood the hospital surgeon and Monsieur Néraud, supported by the smooth-tongued and formidable Vinet. A registrar was present. The surgeon had on his dissecting apron; one of his assistants had opened his roll of instruments and was handing him a scalpel.

This scene was disturbed by the noise made by the fall of the coffin, which Brigaut and the plumber dropped; and by Brigaut himself, who, entering first, was seized with horror on seeing old Madame Lorrain in tears.

'What is the matter?' asked Brigaut, placing himself by her side, and convulsively clutching a chisel he had brought with him.

'The matter!' said the old woman. 'They want to open my child's body, to split her skull—to rend her heart after her death as they did in her lifetime!'

'Who?' said Brigaut, in a voice to crack the drum of the lawyer's ears.

'The Rogrons.'

'By the God above us!——'

'One moment, Brigaut,' said Monsieur Auffray, seeing the Breton brandish his chisel.

'Monsieur Auffray,' said Brigaut, as pale as the dead girl, 'I listen to you because you are Monsieur Auffray. But at this moment I would not listen to——'

'Justice!' Auffray put in.

'Is there such a thing as Justice?' cried Brigaut.

'That—that is Justice!' he went on, threatening the lawyer, the surgeon, and the clerk with his chisel that flashed in the sunlight.

'My good fellow,' said the curé, 'Monsieur Rogron's lawyer has appealed to Justice. His client lies under a serious accusation, and it is impossible to refuse a suspected person the means of clearing himself. According to Monsieur Rogron's advocate, if this poor child died of the abscess on the brain, her former guardian must be regarded as guiltless; for it is proved that Pierrette for a long time concealed the blow she had given herself——'

'That will do!' said Brigaut.

'My client——' Vinet began.

'Your client,' cried the Breton, 'shall go to hell, and I to the scaffold; for if one of you makes an attempt to touch her whom your client killed—if that sawbones does not put his knife away, I will strike him dead.'

'This is overt resistance,' said Vinet; 'we shall lay it before the Court.'

The five strangers withdrew.

'Oh, my son!' said the old woman, starting up and throwing her arms round Brigaut's neck, 'let us bury her at once; they will come back.'

'When once the lead is soldered,' said the plumber, 'perhaps they will not dare.'

Monsieur Auffray hurried off to his brother-in-law, Monsieur Lesourd, to try to get this matter settled. Vinet wished for nothing better. Pierrette once dead, the action as to the guardianship, which was not yet decided, must die a natural death, without any possibility of

argument either for or against the Rogrons; the question remained an open one. So the shrewd lawyer had perfectly foreseen the effect his demand would produce.

At noon Monsieur Desfondrilles reported to the Bench on the inquiry relating to the Rogrons, and the Court pronounced a verdict of no case, on self-evident grounds.

Rogron dared not show his face at Pierrette's funeral, though all the town was present. Vinet tried to drag him there; but the ex-haberdasher feared the excitement of universal reprobation.

Brigaut, after seeing the grave filled up in which Pierrette was laid, left Provins and went on foot to Paris. He addressed a petition to the Dauphiness to be allowed, in consideration of his father's name, to enlist in the Royal Guard, and was soon afterwards enrolled. When an expedition was fitted out for Algiers, he again wrote to the Dauphiness, begging to be ordered on active service. He was then sergeant; Marshal Bourmont made him sub-lieutenant of the Line. The Major's son behaved like a man seeking death. But death has hitherto respected Jacques Brigaut, who has distinguished himself in all the recent expeditions without being once wounded. He is now at the head of a battalion in the Line. There is not a more taciturn or a better officer. Off duty he is speechless, walks alone, and lives like a machine. Every one understands and respects some secret sorrow. He has forty-six thousand francs, left him by old Madame Lorrain, who died in Paris in 1829.

Vinet was elected député in 1830, and the services he has done to the new Government have earned him the place of Prosecutor-General. His influence is now so great that he will always be returned as député. Rogron is Receiver-General in the town where Vinet exercises his high functions, and by a singular coincidence Monsieur Tiphaine is the chief President of the Supreme Court there; for the Judge unhesitatingly attached himself to

the new dynasty of July. The ex-beautiful Madame Tiphaine lives on very good terms with the beautiful Madame Rogron. Vinet and President Tiphaine agree perfectly.

As to Rogron, utterly stupid, he says such things as this—

'Louis Philippe will never be really King till he can create nobles.'

This speech is obviously not his own.

His failing health allows Madame Rogron to hope that ere long she may be free to marry General the Marquis de Montriveau, a peer of France, who is Governor of the department, and attentive to her. Vinet is always in a hurry to condemn a man to death; he never believes in the innocence of the accused. This man, born to be a public prosecutor, is considered one of the most amiable men of his district, and is not less successful in Paris and in the Chamber; at Court he is the exquisite courtier.

General Baron Gouraud, that noble relic of our glorious armies, has married—as Vinet promised that he should—a Demoiselle Matifat, five-and-twenty years of age, the daughter of a druggist in the Rue des Lombards, who had a fortune of fifty thousand crowns. He is Governor—as Vinet prophesied—of a department close to Paris. He was made a peer of France as the reward of his conduct in the riots under Casimir Périer's Ministry. Baron Gouraud was one of the generals who took the Church of Saint-Merry, delighted to 'rap the knuckles' of the civilians who had bullied them for fifteen years; and his zeal won him the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour.

None of those who were implicated in Pierrette's death have any remorse. Monsieur Desfondrilles is still an archæologist; but, to promote his own election, Attorney-General Vinet took care to have him appointed President of the Court. Sylvie holds a little court, and manages

her brother's affairs; she lends at high interest, and does not spend more than twelve hundred francs a year.

From time to time, in the little Square, when some son of Provins comes home from Paris to settle there, and is seen coming out of Mademoiselle Rogron's house, some former partisan of the Tiphaines will say, 'The Rogrons had a very sad affair once about a ward . . .'

'A mere party question,' President Desfondrilles replies. 'Monstrous tales were given out. Out of kindness of heart they took this little Pierrette to live with them, a nice child enough, without a penny; just as she was growing up she had some intrigue with a joiner's apprentice, and would come to her window barefoot to talk to the lad, who used to stand just there, do you see? The lovers sent each other notes by means of a string. As you may suppose, in her state, and in the months of October and November, that was quite enough to upset a little pale-faced girl. The Rogrons behaved admirably; they never claimed their share of the child's inheritance; they gave everything to the grandmother. The moral of it all, my friends, is that the devil always punishes us for a good action.'

'Oh! this is quite another story; old Frappier told it in a very different way!'

'Old Frappier consults his cellar more than his memory,' remarked a frequenter of Mademoiselle Rogron's drawing-room.

'But then old Monsieur Habert——'

'Oh! you know about his share in the matter?'

'No.'

'Why, he wanted to get his sister married to Monsieur Rogron, the Receiver-General.'

Two men daily think of Pierrette—Doctor Martener and Major Brigaut, who alone know the terrible truth.

To give that truth immense proportions, it is enough to recall the fact that if we change the scene to the Middle

Ages, and to the vast theatre of Rome, a sublime girl, Beatrice Cenci, was dragged to the scaffold for reasons and by intrigues almost the same as those which brought Pierrette to the tomb. Beatrice Cenci found none to defend her but an artist—a painter. And to-day history and living people, on the evidence of Guido Reni's portrait, condemn the Pope, and regard Beatrice as one of the most pathetic victims of infamous passions and factions.

And we may agree that the law would be a fine thing for social roguery, if there were no God.

November 1830.

THE ABBÉ BIROTTEAU

To DAVID, Sculptor.

The duration of the work on which I write your name—doubly illustrious in our age—is most uncertain, while you inscribe mine on bronze, which outlives nations even when stamped only by the vulgar die of the coiner. Will not numismatists be puzzled by the many crowned heads in your studio, when they find among the ashes of Paris these lives, prolonged by you beyond the life of nations, in which they will fancy they discover dynasties? Yours is this divine prerogative—mine be the gratitude. *De Balzac.*

In the early autumn of 1826 the Abbé Birotteau, the principal personage of this story, was caught in a shower on his way home from the house where he had spent the evening. He was just crossing, as fast as his burly weight permitted, a little deserted square known as the Close, lying behind the apse of Saint-Gatien at Tours.

The Abbé Birotteau, a short man of apoplectic build, and now sixty years of age, had already had several attacks of gout. Hence, of all the minor miseries of human life, that which the worthy man held in most horror was the sudden wetting of his shoes with their large silver buckles, and the immersion of their soles. In fact, notwithstanding the flannel lining in which he packed his feet in all weathers, with the care a priest

always takes of himself, they often got a little damp; then, next day, the gout unfailingly gave him proof of its constancy.

However, as the cobbles in the Close are always dry, and as the Abbé had won three francs and ten sous at whist from Madame de Listomère, he submitted to the rain with resignation from the middle of the Place de l'Archevêché, where it had begun to fall heavily. Moreover, at this moment he was brooding over his chimera, a longing already twelve years old, a priest's day-dream! A dream which, recurring every evening, now seemed likely to find fulfilment; in short, he was too well wrapped in the fur sleeves of a canon's robes to be sensitive to the severities of the weather. In the course of this evening the accustomed guests who met at Madame de Listomère's had as good as promised him a nomination to the canon's stall at present vacant in the Metropolitan Chapter of Saint-Gatien, by proving to him that no one better deserved it than he, whose claims were indisputable, though so long ignored. If he had lost at cards, if he had heard that the canonry was given to the Abbé Poirel, his rival, the good man would have found the rain very cold; he might have abused life. But he was in one of those rare moments when delightful sensations make us forget everything. Though he hastened his pace, it was in obedience to a mechanical impulse, and truth—so indispensable in a tale of domestic life—requires us to say that he was thinking neither of the shower nor of the gout.

There were formerly round this Close, on the side by the Grand' Rue, a number of houses standing within a wall, and belonging to the Cathedral, inhabited by certain dignitaries of the Chapter. Since the sequestration of ecclesiastical property, the town has taken the alley dividing these houses as a public way, by the name of Rue de la Psalette, leading from the Close to the

High Street. The name itself shows that here formerly dwelt the precentor with his schools and those who were within his jurisdiction. The left side of the street is formed of one large house, its garden walls being bridged by the flying buttresses of Saint-Gatien, which spring from the ground of its strip of garden, making it doubtful whether the Cathedral were built before or after that ancient dwelling. But by examining the mouldings and the shape of the windows, the arch of the doorway, and the external architecture of the house, darkened by time, an archæologist detects that it had always been part and parcel of the magnificent church to which it is wedded. An antiquarian—if there were one at Tours, one of the least literary towns of France—might even discern at the entrance to the passage from the Close some traces of the covered archway which of old served as an entry to these priestly dwellings, and which must have harmonised in character with the main edifice.

This house, being to the north of Saint-Gatien, lies always in the shadow of this vast Cathedral, on which time has cast its gloomy mantle, stamped wrinkles, and set its damp chill, its mosses, and straggling weeds. And it is perennially wrapped in the deepest silence, broken only by the tolling of the bells, the chanted service heard through the Cathedral walls, or the cawing of jackdaws nesting at the top of the belfries. The spot is a desert of masonry, a solitude full of individuality, in which none could dwell but beings absolutely mindless, or gifted with immense strength of soul.

The house in question had always been the home of Abbés, and belonged to an old maid named Mademoiselle Gamard. Although during the Terror the property had been bought from the nation by Mademoiselle Gamard's father, as the worthy maiden had for twenty years past let the rooms to priests, no one, at the Restoration, could take it ill that a bigot should not surrender a piece

of national property; religious persons may have supposed that she meant to bequeath it to the Chapter, and the worldly saw no change in its uses.

It was to this house, then, that the Abbé Birotteau was making his way; he had lived in it for two years. His rooms there had been till then, as the canonry was now, the object of his desires, and his *hoc erat in votis* for a dozen years before. To board with Mademoiselle Gamard and to be made a canon were the two great aims of his life; and perhaps they completely sum up the ambitions of a priest who, regarding himself as a pilgrim to eternity, can in this world wish for no more than a good room, a good table, clean clothes, shoes with silver buckles—all-sufficient for his animal needs—and a canonry to satisfy his pride, the indefinable feeling which will accompany us, no doubt, into the presence of God, since there are grades of rank among the saints.

But the Abbé Birotteau's desire for the rooms he now occupied, so trivial a feeling in the eyes of the worldly wise, had been to him a perfect passion, a passion full of obstacles, and, like the most criminal passions, full of hopes, joys, and remorse.

The arrangements and space in her house did not allow Mademoiselle Gamard to take more than two resident boarders. Now, about twelve years before the day when Birotteau went to lodge with this maiden lady, she had undertaken to preserve in health and contentment Monsieur l'Abbé Troubert and Monsieur l'Abbé Chapeloud. The Abbé Troubert still lived, the Abbé Chapeloud was dead, and Birotteau had been his immediate successor.

The late Abbé Chapeloud, in his lifetime Canon of Saint-Gatien, had been the Abbé Birotteau's intimate friend. Every time the priest had gone into the canon's rooms he had unfailingly admired them, the furniture, and the books. This admiration one day gave birth to a desire to possess these fine things. The Abbé

Birotteau had found it impossible to smother this desire, which often made him dreadfully unhappy when he reflected that only the death of his best friend could satisfy this hidden covetousness, which nevertheless constantly increased.

The Abbé Chapeloud and his friend Birotteau were not rich. Both sons of peasants, they had nothing but the poor emolument doled out to priests, and their small savings had been spent in tiding over the evil days of the Revolution. When Napoleon re-established Catholic worship, the Abbé Chapeloud was made canon of Saint-Gatien, and the Abbé Birotteau became *vicaire*, or mass-priest, of the Cathedral. It was then that Chapeloud went to board with Mademoiselle Gamard. When Birotteau first called on the canon in his new residence, he thought the rooms delightfully arranged, but that was all. The beginnings of this concupiscence for furniture were like those of a real passion in a young man, which often at first is no more than cold admiration of the woman he subsequently loves for ever.

These rooms, reached by a stone staircase, were on the side of the house looking south. The Abbé Troubert inhabited the ground floor, and Mademoiselle Gamard the first floor of the main front to the street. When Chapeloud went in, the rooms were bare and the ceilings blackened by smoke. The chimney fronts, clumsily carved in stone, had never been painted. All the furniture the poor canon could at first put in consisted of a bed, a table, some chairs, and his few books. The apartment was like a fine woman in rags.

But two or three years later, an old lady having left the Abbé Chapeloud two thousand francs, he laid out the money in the purchase of an oak bookcase, saved from the destruction of an old château pulled down by the *Bande noire* (a company who bought old buildings to demolish), and remarkable for carvings worthy of the admiration of artists. The Abbé made the purchase,

fascinated less by its cheapness than by its exact correspondence in size with the dimensions of his corridor. His savings then allowed him completely to restore this corridor, until now abandoned to neglect. The floor was carefully waxed, the ceiling white-washed, the woodwork painted and grained to imitate the tone and knots of oak. A marble chimney-shelf replaced the old one. The Canon had taste enough to hunt up and find some old armchairs of carved walnut wood. Then a long ebony table and two little Boulle cabinets gave this library a finish full of character.

Within two years, the liberality of various devout persons, and the bequests of pious penitents, though small, had filled the shelves of the bookcase hitherto vacant. Finally, an uncle of Chapeloud's, an old Oratorian, left him his collection in folio of the *Fathers of the Church*, and several other large works of value to an ecclesiastic.

Birotteau, more and more surprised by the successive transformations in this formerly bare corridor, by degrees became involuntarily covetous. He longed to possess this study, so perfectly adapted to the gravity of priestly habits. This passion grew day by day. Spending whole days, as he often did, in working in this snuggery, he could appreciate the silence and peace of it, after having at first admired its comfortable arrangement. For the next few years the Abbé Chapeloud used this retreat as an oratory which his lady friends delighted to embellish. Later, again, a lady presented to the Canon a piece of furniture in worsted work for his bedroom, at which she had long been stitching under the amiable priest's eyes without his suspecting its purpose. Then Birotteau was as much dazzled by the bedroom as by the library.

Finally, three years before his death, the Abbé Chapeloud had completed the comfort of his rooms by decorating the drawing-room. Though simply furnished

with red Utrecht velvet, this had been too much for Birotteau. From the day when the Canon's friend first saw the red silk curtains, the mahogany furniture, the Aubusson carpet that graced this large room, freshly painted, Chapeloud's apartment became to him the object of a secret monomania. To live there, to sleep in the great bed with silk curtains in which the Canon slept, and have all his comforts about him as Chapeloud had, seemed to Birotteau perfect happiness; he looked for nothing beyond. Every feeling which envy and ambition arouse in the souls of other men, was, in that of the Abbé Birotteau, centred in the deep and secret longing with which he wished for a home like that created for himself by the Abbé Chapeloud. When his friend fell ill, it was no doubt sincere affection that brought Birotteau to see him; but on first hearing of the Canon's sickness, and while sitting with him, there rose from the depths of his soul a thousand thoughts, of which the simplest formula was always this, 'If Chapeloud dies, I can have his rooms.' Still, as Birotteau had a good heart, strict principles, and a narrow intellect, he never went so far as to conceive of means for getting his friend to leave him his library and furniture.

The Abbé Chapeloud, an amiable and indulgent egoist, guessed his friend's mania—which it was not difficult to do, and forgave it—which for a priest would seem less easy. Still, Birotteau, whose friendship remained unaltered, never ceased to walk day after day with the Canon up and down the same path in the Mall at Tours without curtailing by a single minute the time devoted to this exercise for the last twenty years. Birotteau thought of his involuntary wishes as sins, and would have been capable, in sheer contrition, of the utmost devotion for Chapeloud's sake.

The Canon paid his debt to this sincere and artless brotherliness by saying, a few days before his death, to

the priest, who was reading to him from the *Quotidienne*, 'You will get the rooms this time. I feel that it is all over with me.'

In fact, by his will, the Abbé Chapeloud left his library and furniture to Birotteau. The possession of these much-longed-for things, and the prospect of being taken as a boarder by Mademoiselle Gamard, greatly softened Birotteau's grief at the loss of his friend the Canon. He would not perhaps have called him to life again, but he wept for him. For several days he was like Gargantua, whose wife died in giving birth to Pantagruel, and who knew not whether to rejoice over his son's birth or to lament at having buried his good Badebec, and made the mistake of rejoicing at his wife's death and deploring the birth of Pantagruel.

The Abbé Birotteau spent the first days of his grief in verifying the volumes of *his* library, and enjoying the use of *his* furniture, examining them, and saying in a tone, which, unfortunately, could not be recorded, 'Poor Chapeloud!' In short, his joy and his grief were so absorbing that he felt no distress at seeing the canonry bestowed on another, though the lamented Chapeloud had always hoped that Birotteau might be his successor. Mademoiselle Gamard received the Abbé with pleasure as a boarder, and he thus enjoyed thenceforth all the delights of material existence that the deceased Canon had so highly praised.

Incalculable advantages! For, to hear the late departed Canon Chapeloud, not one of the priests who dwelt in the town of Tours, not even the Archbishop himself, could be the object of care so delicate or so precise as that lavished by Mademoiselle Gamard on her two boarders. The first words spoken by the Canon to his friend as they walked in the Mall had almost always referred to the excellent dinner he had just eaten; and it was a rare thing if, in the course of the seven walks they took in the week, he did not happen to say at least four-

teen times, 'That good woman has certainly a vocation for taking charge of the priesthood.'

'Only think,' said the Canon to Birotteau, 'for twelve successive years clean linen, albs, surplices, bands—nothing has ever been missing. I always find everything in its place and in sufficient numbers, all smelling of orris-root. My furniture is constantly polished, and so well wiped that for a long time past I have not known what dust means. Did you ever see a speck in my rooms? Then the fire-logs are well chosen, the smallest things are all good; in short, it is as if Mademoiselle Gamard always had an eye on my room. I cannot recollect in ten years ever having had to ring twice for anything whatever. That I call living! never to have to look for a thing, not even for one's slippers; always to find a good fire and a good table. Once my bellows put me out, the nozzle had got burnt; I had not to complain twice. The very next day Mademoiselle had bought me a nice pair of bellows and the pair of tongs you see me use to put the fire together.'

Birotteau's only reply was, 'Smelling of orris-root!' That smelling of orris-root always struck him. The Canon's words painted a really ideal state of happiness to the poor priest whose bands and albs nearly turned his brain; for he had no sense of order, and not unfrequently forgot to bespeak his dinner. And so, whenever he caught sight of Mademoiselle Gamard at Saint-Gatien, either while going round for the offertory or while reading mass, he never failed to give her a gentle and kindly glance such as Saint Theresa may have raised to heaven.

Though the comfort which every creature desires, and of which he had so often dreamed, had now fallen to his lot, as it is difficult for any man, even for a priest, to live without a hobby, for the last eighteen months the Abbé Birotteau had substituted for his two gratified

passions a craving for a canonry. The title of canon had become to him what that of a peer must be to a plebeian minister. And the probability of a nomination, the hopes he had just been encouraged in at Madame de Listomère's, had so effectually turned his brain that it was only on reaching home that he discovered that he had left his umbrella at her house. Perhaps, indeed, but for the rain that fell in torrents, he would not have remembered it then, so completely was he absorbed in repeating to himself all that had been said on the subject of his preferment by the members of the party at Madame de Listomère's—an old lady with whom he spent every Wednesday evening.

The Abbé rang sharply as a hint to the maid not to keep him waiting. Then he shrank into the corner by the door so as to be splashed as little as possible; but the water from the roof ran off precisely on the toes of his shoes, and the gusts of wind blew on to him squalls of rain not unlike a repeated shower bath. After calculating the time necessary for coming from the kitchen to pull the latch-string under the door, he rang again, a very significant peal. 'They cannot have gone out,' thought he, hearing not a sound within. And for the third time he rang, again and again, a peal that sounded so sharply through the house, and was so loudly repeated by every echo in the Cathedral, that it was impossible not to be roused by this assertive jangle. And a few moments after it was not without satisfaction, mingled with annoyance, that he heard the maid's wooden shoes clattering over the pebbly stone floor. Still, the gouty priest's troubles were not over so soon as he thought. Instead of pulling the latch, Marianne was obliged to unlock the door with the huge key, and draw back the bolts.

'How can you leave me to ring three times in such weather?' said he to Marianne.

'Why, sir, as you see, the house was locked up. Every-

body has been in bed a long time; it has struck a quarter to ten. Mademoiselle must have thought you had not gone out.'

'But you yourself saw me go out. Besides, Mademoiselle knows very well that I go to Madame de Listomère's every Wednesday.'

'Well, sir, I only did as Mademoiselle told me,' replied Marianne, locking the door again.

These words were a blow to the Abbé, which he felt all the more keenly for the intense bliss of his day-dream. He said nothing, but followed Marianne to the kitchen, to fetch his bedroom candle, which he supposed would have been brought down there. But instead of going to the kitchen, Marianne lighted the Abbé up to his rooms, where he found the candlestick on a table outside the door of the red drawing-room, in a sort of anteroom, formed of the stair-landing, which the Canon had shut in for the purpose by a large glass partition. Dumb with surprise, he hurried into his bedroom, found no fire on the hearth, and called Marianne, who had not yet had time to go downstairs.

'You have not lighted my fire?' said he.

'I beg your pardon, sir; it must have gone out again.'

Birotteau looked again at the hearth, and saw plainly that the ashes had been piled there since the morning.

'I want to dry my feet,' he went on; 'make up the fire.'

Marianne obeyed with the haste of a woman who wants to go to sleep. While the Abbé himself hunted for his slippers, failing to see them in the middle of his bed-rug, as usual, he made certain observations as to the way Marianne was dressed, which proved to a demonstration that she had not just got out of bed, as she had asserted. And he then remembered that for about a fortnight past he had been weaned from all the little attentions that had made life so endurable for the last eighteen

months. Now, as it is in the nature of narrow minds to argue from minute things, he at once gave himself up to deep reflections on these four incidents, imperceptible to anybody else, but to him nothing less than four catastrophes. The oversight as to his slippers, Marianne's falsehood with regard to the fire, the unaccustomed removal of his candlestick to the table in the anteroom, and the long waiting so ingeniously inflicted on him, on the threshold in the rain, were ominous of a complete wreck of his happiness.

When the fire was blazing on the dogs, when his night-lamp was lighted, and Marianne had left him without inquiring as usual, 'Does Monsieur need anything further?' the Abbé sank gently into his departed friend's roomy and handsome easy-chair; still, his action as he dropped into it was somewhat melancholy. The worthy man was oppressed by the presentiment of terrible disaster. His eyes fell in succession on the handsome timepiece, the chest of drawers, the chairs, curtains, and rugs, the four-post bed, the holy-water shell and the crucifix, on a Virgin by le Valentin, on a Christ by Lebrun—in short, on all the details of the room; the expression of his face betrayed the pangs of the tenderest farewell that a lover ever looked at his first mistress, or an old man at his latest plantation. The Abbé had just detected—a little late, it is true—the symptoms of a covert persecution to which he had for about three months been subjected by Mademoiselle Gamard, whose ill-will would no doubt have been suspected sooner by a man of keener intelligence.

Have not all old maids a certain talent for emphasising the acts and words suggested to them by hatred? They scratch as cats do. And not only do they hurt, but they take pleasure in hurting, and in making their victim see that they can hurt. While a man of the world would not have allowed himself to be clawed a second time, the worthy Birotteau had taken several

scratches in the face before he had conceived of malignant purpose.

Immediately, with the inquisitioral shrewdness acquired by priests, accustomed as they are to direct consciences and to investigate trifles from the shades of the confessional, the Abbé Birotteau set to work to formulate the following proposition—as though it were the basis of a religious controversy.—Granting that Mademoiselle Gamard may have forgotten Madame de Listomère's evening—that Marianne had neglected to light my fire—that they thought I was at home; as it is certain that I, *myself*, must have taken my candlestick downstairs this morning!!!—it is impossible that Mademoiselle Gamard, seeing it in her sitting-room, could have supposed I had gone to bed. *Ergo*, Mademoiselle Gamard left me at the door in the rain on purpose; and by having the candlestick carried up to my rooms she meant me to know it.—'What does it mean?' he said aloud, carried away by the gravity of the case, as he rose to take off his wet clothes, and put on his dressing-gown and his nightcap. Then he went from the bed to the fire gesticulating and jerking out such comments as these, in various tones of voice, all ended in a falsetto pitch as though to represent points of interrogation.

'What the deuce have I done? Why does she owe me a grudge?—Marianne cannot have forgotten my fire; Mademoiselle must have told her not to light it! I should be childish not to see from the tone and manner she assumes towards me that I have been so unfortunate as to displease her.—Nothing of the kind ever happened to Chapeloud!—It will be impossible for me to live in the midst of the annoyances that . . . At my age too!'

He went to bed, hoping to clear up on the morrow the cause of the hatred which was destroying for ever the happiness he had enjoyed for two years after wishing for it so long. Alas! the secret motives of Mademoiselle

Gamard's feeling against him were destined to remain for ever unknown to him ; not because they were difficult to guess, but because the poor man had not the simple candour which enables great minds and thorough scoundrels to recognise and judge themselves. Only a man of genius or a master of intrigue ever says to himself, 'I was to blame.' Interest and talent are the only conscientious and lucid counsellors.

Now, the Abbé Birotteau, whose kindliness went to the pitch of silliness, whose knowledge was a sort of veneer laid on by patient work, who had no experience whatever of the world and its ways, and who lived between the altar and the confessional, chiefly engaged in deciding trivial cases of conscience in his capacity of confessor to the schools of the town and to some noble souls who appreciated him—the Abbé Birotteau was, in short, to be regarded as a big baby to whom the greater part of social customs were absolutely unknown. At the same time, the selfishness natural to all human beings, reinforced by the egoism peculiar to a priest, and by that of the narrow life of a provincial town, had insensibly grown strong in him without his suspecting it. If any one had taken enough interest in searching the good man's soul to show him that, in the infinitely small details of his existence and the trivial duties of his private life, he failed essentially in the self-sacrifice he professed, he would have punished and mortified himself in all sincerity.

But those whom we offend, even unwittingly, reck not of our innocence ; they desire and achieve revenge. Thus Birotteau, weak as he was, was doomed to suffer under the hand of that great distributive Justice which always trusts the world to carry out its sentences, known to many simpletons as the misfortunes of life.

There was this difference between Canon Chapeloud and the Abbé : one was a witty and ingenious egoist, the other an honest and clumsy one. When Monsieur

Chapeloud had come to board with Mademoiselle Gamard, he could perfectly well gauge his landlady's character. The confessional had enlightened him as to the bitterness infused into an old maid's heart by the misfortune of finding herself outside society; his behaviour to Mademoiselle Gamard was shrewdly calculated. The lady being no more than eight-and-thirty, still had those little pretensions which, in such discreet persons, turn in later years into a high opinion of themselves.

The Canon understood that, to live comfortably with Mademoiselle Gamard, he must always show her the same respect and attention, and be more infallible than the Pope. To attain this end he established no points of contact between himself and her beyond what the strictest politeness required, and those necessarily subsisting between two persons living under the same roof. Thus, though he and the Abbé Troubert regularly took their three meals a days, he had never appeared at breakfast, but had accustomed Mademoiselle Gamard to send up to him, in his bed, a cup of coffee with milk. Then, he had avoided the boredom of supper by always taking tea at some house where he spent the evening. Thus he rarely saw his landlady at any time of the day excepting at dinner, but he always came into the room a few minutes before the hour. During this polite little visit, every day of the twelve years he had spent under her roof he had asked her the same questions and received the same answers. How Mademoiselle Gamard had slept during the night, the breakfast, little domestic events, the appearance of her face, the health of her person, the weather, the length of the Church services, the incidents of the morning's Mass, the health of this or that priest, constituted the themes of this daily dialogue.

During dinner he always indulged her with indirect flattery, going on from the quality of the fish, the excellence of some seasoning, or the merits of a sauce, to

those of Mademoiselle Gamard and her virtues as a housekeeper. He was sure of soothing all the old maid's conceits when he praised the art with which her preserves were made, her gherkins pickled, and the excellence of her jam, her pies, and other gastronomical inventions. Finally, the wily Canon never quitted her yellow drawing-room without remarking that there was not another house in Tours where the coffee was so good as that he had just been drinking.

Thanks to this perfect comprehension of Mademoiselle Gamard's character, and this science of life as practised by the Canon for those twelve years, no grounds had ever occurred for a discussion on any matter of domestic discipline. The Abbé Chapeloud had from the first discerned every angle, every rasping edge, every asperity in this old maid, and had so regulated the effect of the tangents where they inevitably met, as to secure from her every concession needed for peace and happiness in life. And Mademoiselle Gamard would always say that Canon Chapeloud was a most amiable man, very easy to live with, and full of wit.

As to the Abbé Troubert, the bigot never by any chance spoke of him. Troubert had so completely fallen into the routine of her life, like a satellite in the orbit of its planet, that he had become to her a sort of mongrel creature between those of the human and those of the canine species; he filled a place in her mind exactly below that occupied by her friends and that filled by a fat asthmatic pug-dog to which she was tenderly devoted; she managed him completely, and their interests became so inextricably knit that many persons of Mademoiselle Gamard's circle supposed that the Abbé Troubert had an eye to the old maid's fortune, and was attaching her to him by his constant patience, guiding her all the more effectually because he affected to obey her, never allowing her to see in him the faintest wish to rule her.

When the Canon died, the old maid, anxious to have

a boarder of quiet habits, naturally thought of this priest. The Canon's will had not yet been opened when Mademoiselle Gamard was already meditating giving the departed Canon's upper rooms to her worthy Abbé Troubert, whom she thought but poorly lodged on the ground floor. But when the Abbé Birotteau came to discuss with her the written conditions of her terms, she found that he was so much in love with the lodgings for which he had long cherished a passion he might now avow, that she did not venture to propose an exchange, and affection gave way before the pressure of interest. To console her favourite Abbé, Mademoiselle substituted a parquet flooring in a neat pattern for the white Château-Renaud tiles in the ground-floor rooms, and rebuilt a chimney that smoked.

The Abbé Birotteau had seen his friend Chapeloud constantly for twelve years, without its ever having occurred to him to wonder why he was so excessively circumspect in his intercourse with the old maid. When he came to live under this saintly damsel's roof he felt like a lover on the verge of happiness. Even if he had not been blinded by natural stupidity, his eyes were too much dazzled by contentment for him to be capable of gauging Mademoiselle Gamard or of considering the due measure of his daily relations with her. Mademoiselle Gamard, seen from afar, through the prism of the material enjoyment the Abbé dreamed of finding with her, appeared to him an admirable creature, a perfect Christian, an essentially charitable soul, the woman of the Gospel, the wise Virgin graced with the humble and modest virtues which shed celestial fragrance over life. And thus, with all the enthusiasm of a man who has reached a long-wished-for goal, with the simplicity of a child and the silly heedlessness of an old man devoid of worldly experience, he came into Mademoiselle Gamard's life as a fly is caught in a spider's web.

So the first day he was to dine and sleep in the old

maid's house he lingered in her drawing-room, as much in the wish to make acquaintance with her as in the inexplicable embarrassment that often troubles shy people and makes them fear lest they should be rude if they break off a conversation to leave the room. So there he remained all the evening. Another old maid, a friend of Birotteau's, Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix, came in the evening. Then Mademoiselle Gamard had the joy of arranging a game of boston. The Abbé, as he went to bed, thought he had had a very pleasant evening.

As yet he knew Mademoiselle Gamard and the Abbé Troubert but very little, and saw only the surface. Few persons show their faults unveiled at first. Generally everybody tries to assume an attractive exterior. So Birotteau conceived the delightful purpose of devoting his evenings to Mademoiselle Gamard instead of spending them elsewhere. The lady had some few years since conceived a desire which revived more strongly every day. This desire, common to old men, and even to pretty women, had become in her a passion like that of Birotteau for his friend Chapeloud's rooms, and was rooted in the old maid's heart by the feelings of pride, egoism, envy, and vanity which are innate in the worldly-minded. This story repeats itself in every age. You have but slightly to enlarge the circle at the bottom of which these personages are about to move, to find the co-efficient motive of events which happen in the highest ranks of society.

Mademoiselle Gamard spent her evenings at six or eight different houses by turns. Whether it was that she was annoyed at having to seek company, and thought that at her age she had a right to expect some return; whether her conceit was affronted by her having no circle of her own; or whether it was that her vanity craved the compliments and amusements she saw her friends enjoying,—all her ambition was to make her *salon*

a centre of union towards which a certain number of persons would tend every evening with pleasure. When Birotteau and his friend Mademoiselle Salomon had spent a few evenings in her room with the faithful and patient Abbé Troubert, one night, as she came out of Saint-Gatien, Mademoiselle Gamard said to the kind friends of whom she had hitherto considered herself the slave, that those who cared to see her might very well come once a week to her house, where a sufficient party met already to make up a game of boston; that she could not leave her new boarder, the Abbé Birotteau, alone; that Mademoiselle Salomon had not yet missed a single evening of the week; that she belonged to her boarders; and that, etc., etc.

Her speech was all the more humbly haughty and volubly sweet because Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix belonged to the most aristocratic circle in Tours. Though Mademoiselle Salomon came solely for the Abbé's sake, Mademoiselle Gamard triumphed in having her in her drawing-room. Thanks to the Abbé Birotteau, she found herself on the eve of succeeding in her great scheme of forming a circle which might become as numerous and as agreeable as were those of Madame de Listomère, of Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottière, and other devout persons in a position to receive the pious society of Tours. But, alas! the Abbé Birotteau brought Mademoiselle Gamard's hopes to an overthrow.

Now, if any persons, who have attained in life the enjoyment of a long-wished-for happiness, have entered into the gladness the Abbé must have felt in lying down to rest in Chapeloud's bed, they must also form a slight notion of Mademoiselle Gamard's chagrin at the ruin of her cherished scheme. After accepting his good fortune patiently enough for six months, Birotteau deserted his home, carrying with him Mademoiselle Salomon.

In spite of unheard-of efforts, the ambitious Gamard had secured no more than five or six recruits, whose

fidelity was very problematical, and at least four unfailing visitors were needed for regular boston. She was consequently obliged to make honourable amends and return to her old friends, for old maids are too poor company to themselves not to crave the doubtful pleasures of society.

The causes of this defection are easily imagined. Though the Abbé was one of those to whom Paradise shall one day be opened in virtue of the words, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' he, like many fools, could not endure the weariness inflicted on him by other fools. Unintelligent persons are like weeds that thrive in good ground; they love to be amused in proportion to the degree in which they weary themselves. Being the incarnation of the dulness they suffer from, the craving they perpetually feel to be divorced from themselves produces the mania for excitement, the need to be where they are not, which characterises them as it does other creatures who lack feeling, or whose lot is a failure, or who suffer by their own fault. Without understanding too clearly the vacuity and nullity of Mademoiselle Gamard, or discerning the smallness of her mind, poor Birotteau discovered, too late for happiness, the faults she had in common with all old maids, as well as those personal to herself.

What is evil, in other people, contrasts so strongly with what is good, that it generally strikes the eye before inflicting a wound. This moral phenomenon might at need justify the tendency that leads us all more or less to evil speaking. Socially speaking, it is so natural to satirise the faults of others, that we ought to forgive the severe gossip to which our own absurdities give rise, and wonder at nothing but calumny.

But the good Abbé's eyes were never at the precise focus which enables the worldly wise to see and at once evade their neighbours' sharp tongues; to discover his landlady's faults, he was obliged to endure the warning given by nature to all its creatures, that of suffering.

Old maids, having never bent their temper or their lives to other lives and other tempers, as woman's destiny requires, have for the most part a mania for making everything about them bend to them. In Mademoiselle Gamard this feeling had degenerated into despotism, but this despotism could only be exerted in small things. For instance—out of a thousand cases—the basket of counters and fish placed on the boston table for the Abbé Birotteau must be left on the spot where she had put it, and the Abbé irritated her extremely by moving it, as he did almost every evening. What was the cause of this touchiness foolishly provoked by mere trifles, and what was its object? No one could say; Mademoiselle Gamard herself did not know.

Though very lamblike by nature, the new boarder did not like to feel the crook too often, any more than a sheep, especially a crook set with nails. Without understanding Canon Troubert's amazing patience, Birotteau was anxious to escape the bliss which Mademoiselle Gamard was bent on seasoning to her own taste, for she thought she could compound happiness as she could preserves; but the luckless priest set to work very clumsily, as a result of his perfectly artless nature. So the separation was not effected without some clawing and pricking, to which the Abbé Birotteau tried to seem insensible.

By the end of the first year of his life under Mademoiselle Gamard's roof the Abbé had fallen into his old habits, spending two evenings a week at Madame de Listomère's, three with Mademoiselle Salomon, and the other two with Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottière. These ladies moved in the aristocratic sphere of Tours society, to which Mademoiselle Gamard was not admitted. So the landlady was excessively indignant at the Abbé's defection, which made her aware of her small importance: any kind of selection implying some contempt for the rejected object.

'Monsieur Birotteau did not find us good enough company,' the Abbé Troubert would say to Mademoiselle Gamard's friends when she was obliged to give up her 'evenings.' 'He is a wit, a *gourmet*! He must have fashion, luxury, brilliant conversation, the tittle-tattle of the town.'

And such words always prompted Mademoiselle Gamard to praise the Canon's excellent temper at the expense of Birotteau's.

'He is not so clever when all is said,' she remarked. 'But for Canon Chapeloud he would never have been received by Madame de Listomère. Oh, I lost a great deal when the Abbé Chapeloud died. What an amiable man! and so easy to live with! Indeed, in twelve years we never had the smallest difficulty or disagreement.'

Mademoiselle Gamard painted so unflattering a portrait of Monsieur Birotteau that her innocent boarder was regarded by this citizen circle, secretly hostile to the aristocratic class, as an essentially fractious man, very difficult to get on with. Then for a few weeks the old maid had the satisfaction of hearing herself pitied by her female friends, who, without believing a word of what they said, repeated again and again, 'How can you, who are so gentle and so kind, have inspired him with such dislike?——' or, 'Be comforted, dear Mademoiselle Gamard, every one knows you too well——' and so forth.

Delighted, nevertheless, to escape spending an evening each week in the Close—the most deserted and gloomy spot in all Tours, and the most remote from the centre of life—they all blessed the Abbé.

Love or hatred must constantly increase between two persons who are always together; every moment fresh reasons are found for loving or hating better. Thus to Mademoiselle Gamard the Abbé Birotteau became unendurable. Eighteen months after taking him as a boarder, just when the good man believed he had found the peace of contentment in the silence of aversion, and prided

himself on having come so comfortably to terms with the old woman, to use his expression, he was to her the object of covert persecution and calmly planned animosity.

The four capital facts of the closed door, the forgotten slippers, the lack of fire, the candlestick taken to his rooms, alone could betray the terrible enmity of which the last effects were not to fall on him till the moment when they would be irremediable. As he went to sleep, the good Abbé racked his brain, but vainly—and, indeed, he must soon have come to the bottom of it—to account for Mademoiselle Gamard's singularly uncivil behaviour. In point of fact, as he had originally acted very logically, obeying the natural law of his egoism, he could not possibly form a guess as to how he had offended his landlady. While great things are simple to understand, and easy to express, the mean things of life need much detail. The incidents which constitute the prologue, as it were, to this parochial drama, in which the passions will be seen not less violent than if they had been excited by important interests, necessitated this long introduction, and any exact historian would have found it difficult to abridge the trivial tale.

When he awoke next morning, the Abbé's thoughts were so much set on the canonry, that he forgot the four circumstances which, the evening before, had appeared to him to be sinister prognostics of a future full of disaster. Birotteau was not the man to get up without a fire; he rang to announce to Marianne that he was awake, and wanted her; then, as he was wont, he lay lost in a somnolent, half-dreamy state, during which, as a rule, the woman made the fire, and dragged him gently from his last doze by a hum of inquiry and quiet bustle —a sort of music that he liked.

Half an hour went by, and Marianne had not appeared. The Abbé, already half a Canon, was about to ring again,

when he stayed his hand on hearing a man's step on the stairs. In fact, the Abbé Troubert, after discreetly tapping at the door, at Birotteau's bidding came in. This call did not surprise him; the priests were in the habit of paying each other a visit once a month. The Canon was at once amazed that Marianne should not yet have lighted his quasi-colleague's fire. He opened a window, called Marianne in a rough tone, and bid her come up at once; then, turning to his brother priest, he said, 'If Mademoiselle should hear that you have no fire, she would give Marianne a good scolding.'

After this speech he inquired for Birotteau's health, and asked him, in an insinuating voice, whether he had any recent news that could encourage his hope of being made a Canon. The Abbé explained to him what was being done, and guilelessly told him who the personages were that Madame de Listomère was canvassing, not knowing that Troubert had never forgiven that lady for not inviting him to her house—him—Canon Troubert, twice designate to be made Vicar-General of the diocese.

It would be impossible to meet with two figures offering so many points of contrast as those of these two priests. Troubert, tall and lean, had a bilious yellow hue, while Birotteau was what is familiarly called crummy. His face, round and florid, spoke of good-nature devoid of ideas; while Troubert's, long and furrowed by deep wrinkles, wore at times an expression of irony and scorn; still, attentive examination was needed to discover these feelings. The Canon was habitually and absolutely placid, his eyelids almost always lowered over a pair of orange-hazel eyes, whose glance was at will very clear and piercing. Red hair completed this countenance, which was constantly clouded under the shroud cast over his features by serious meditations. Several persons had at first supposed him to be absorbed in high and rooted ambition; but those who thought they knew him best

had ended by demolishing this opinion, representing him as stultified by Mademoiselle Gamard's tyranny, or worn by long fasting. He rarely spoke, and never laughed. When he happened to be pleasurably moved, a faint smile appeared and lost itself in the furrows on his cheeks.

Birotteau, on the other hand, was all expansiveness, all openness; he liked titbits, and could be amused by a trifle with the artlessness of a man free from gall and malice. The Abbé Troubert at first sight inspired an involuntary feeling of dread, while the Vicar made every one who looked at him smile kindly. When the tall Canon stalked solemnly along the cloisters and aisles of Saint-Gatien, his brow bent, his eye stern, he commanded respect; his bowed figure harmonised with the yellow vaulting of the cathedral; there was something monumental in the folds of his gown, and worthy of the sculptor's art. But the good little Abbé moved without dignity, trotted and pattered, looking as if he rolled along.

And yet the two men had one point of resemblance. While Troubert's ambitious looks, by making the world afraid of him, had perhaps contributed to condemn him to the modest dignity of a mere Canon, Birotteau's character and appearance seemed to stamp him for ever as no more than a *vicaire* of the Cathedral. The Abbé Troubert meanwhile, at the age of fifty, by the moderation of his conduct, by the apparently total absence of any ambition in his aims, and by his saintly life, had dispelled the fears his superiors had conceived of his supposed cleverness and his alarming exterior. Indeed, for a year past, his health had been seriously impaired, so that his early promotion to the dignity of Vicar-General to the Archbishop seemed probable. His rivals even hoped for his appointment, to enable them the more effectually to prepare for their own, during the short span of life that might yet be granted him by a malady that had become chronic. Birotteau's triple

chin, far from suggesting the same hopes, displayed to the candidates who were struggling for the canonry all the symptoms of vigorous health, and his gout seemed to them the proverbial assurance of a long life.

The Abbé Chapeloud, a man of great good sense, whose amiability had secured him the friendship of persons in good society and of the various heads of the diocese, had always opposed the elevation of the Abbé Troubert, secretly and with much address; he had even hindered his admission to any of the *salons* where the best set in Tours were wont to meet, though during his lifetime Troubert always treated him with great respect, and on all occasions showed him the utmost deference. This persistent submissiveness had not availed to change the deceased Canon's opinion; during his last walk with Birotteau, he had said to him once more—

'Do not trust that dry pole Troubert! He is Sixtus V. reduced to the scale of a bishopric.'

This was Mademoiselle Gamard's friend and messmate, who, the very day after that on which she had, so to speak, declared war with poor Birotteau, had come to call on him with every mark of friendliness.

'You must excuse Marianne,' said Troubert as she came in. 'I fancy she did my room first. My place is very damp, and I coughed a great deal during the night. —You are very healthily situated here,' he added, looking up at the mouldings.

'Oh, I am lodged like a Canon!' replied Birotteau with a smile.

'And I like a curate,' replied the humble priest.

'Yes, but before long you will be lodged in the Archbishop's Palace,' said the good Abbé, who only wanted that everybody should be happy.

'Oh! or in the graveyard. God's will be done!' and Troubert looked up to heaven with a resigned air. 'I came,' he went on, 'to beg you to lend me the *General*

Clergy List. No one but you has the book at Tours.'

'Take it out of the bookcase,' replied Birotteau, reminded by the Canon's last words of all the joys of his life.

The tall priest went into the library, and remained there all the time the Abbé was dressing. Presently the breakfast-bell rang, and Birotteau, reflecting that but for Troubert's visit he would have had no fire to get up by, said to himself, 'He is a good man!'

The two priests went down together, each armed with an enormous folio, which they laid on one of the consoles in the dining-room.

'What in the world is that?' asked Mademoiselle Gamard in sharp tones, addressing Birotteau. 'You are not going to lumber up my dining-room with old books, I hope!'

'They are some books I wanted,' said the Abbé Troubert. 'Monsieur is kind enough to lend them to me.'

'I might have guessed that,' said she with a scornful smile. 'Monsieur Birotteau does not often study such big books.'

'And how are you, Mademoiselle?' asked the Abbé in a piping voice.

'Why, not at all well,' she replied curtly. 'You were the cause of my being roused from my first sleep, and I felt the effects all night.' And as she seated herself, Mademoiselle Gamard added, 'Gentlemen, the milk will get cold.'

Astounded at being so sourly received by his hostess when he expected her to apologise, but frightened, as timid people are, by the prospect of a discussion, especially when they themselves are the subject of it, the poor Abbé took his place in silence. Then, recognising in Mademoiselle Gamard's face the obvious symptoms of a bad temper, he sat warring with his

common-sense, which advised him not to submit to her want of manners, while his nature prompted him to avoid a quarrel. Birotteau, a prey to this internal struggle, began by seriously studying the broad-green stripes painted on the oilcloth cover, which, from immemorial habit, Mademoiselle Gamard always left on the table during breakfast, heedless of the frayed edges and scars innumerable that covered this cloth. The two boarders were seated opposite each other, in cane arm-chairs at each end of the table, a royal square; the place between them being occupied by the landlady, who towered above the table from a chair mounted on runners, padded with cushions, and backing on the dining-room stove. This room and the common sitting-room were on the ground floor, under the Abbé Birotteau's bedroom and drawing-room. When the Abbé had received from Mademoiselle Gamard his cup of sweetened coffee, he felt chilled by the utter silence in which he was doomed to perform the usually cheerful function of breakfast. He dared not look either at Troubert's expressionless face, nor at the old maid's threatening countenance; so, to do something, he turned to the pug-dog, overburdened with fat, lying near the stove on a cushion whence it never stirred, finding always on the left a little plate of dainties, and on the right a saucer of clean water.

'Well, my pet,' said he, 'so you want your coffee!'

This personage, one of the most important members of the household, but not a troublesome one, since he never barked now, and left the conversation to his mistress, looked up at Birotteau with little eyes buried in the folds of fat that wrinkled his face. Then he cunningly shut them again.

To give the measure of the priest's discomfiture, it must be explained that, being gifted with a voice and volubility as resonant and meaningless as the sound of

an india-rubber ball, he asserted, without being able to give the faculty any reason for his opinion, that speech favoured digestion. Mademoiselle Gamard, who shared this theory of hygiene, had never hitherto failed to converse during meals, notwithstanding their misunderstanding; but now for some few days the Abbé had racked his wits in vain to ask her insidious questions which might loosen her tongue. If the narrow limits to which this story is restricted would allow of a report in full of one of these conversations which always provoked the Abbé Troubert's bitter and sardonic smiles, it would give a perfect picture of the Bœotian existence of provincials. Some clever men might perhaps be even pleased to know the extraordinary amplitude given by the Abbé Birotteau and Mademoiselle Gamard to their personal opinions on politics, religion, and literature. There would certainly be some very funny things to tell: such as their reasons, in 1820, for doubting the death of Napoleon, or the conjectures which led them to believe in the survival of Louis XVII., smuggled away in a hollow log of wood. Who would not have laughed to hear them asserting, with arguments peculiarly their own, that the King of France alone spent the money collected in taxes; that the Chambers met to destroy the Clergy; that more than thirteen hundred thousand persons had perished on the scaffold during the Revolution? Then they discussed the press, knowing nothing of how many newspapers were issued, having not the smallest idea of what this modern power is. Finally, Monsieur Birotteau listened respectfully to Mademoiselle Gamard when she asserted that a man fed on an egg every morning would infallibly die at the end of a year, and that it had been known; that a soft roll eaten without drinking for a few days would cure sciatica; that all the workmen who had been employed in the destruction of the Abbey of Saint-Martin had died within six months; that a certain préfet had done his

utmost in Bonaparte's time to ruin the towers of Saint-Gatien, and a thousand other absurd stories.

But at the present juncture Birotteau felt his tongue dead within him; so he resigned himself to eating without trying to converse. He soon thought that such silence was perilous to his digestion, and boldly said, 'This is excellent coffee!' But the courageous act fell flat.

After looking at the narrow strip of sky above the garden, between the two black buttresses of Saint-Gatien, the Abbé again was brave enough to remark, 'It will be finer to-day than it was yesterday.'

At this Mademoiselle Gamard did no more than cast one of her most ingratiating glances at Monsieur Troubert, and then turn her eyes full of terrible severity on Birotteau, who was happily looking down.

No being of the female sex was better able to assume the elegiac attitude of an old maid than Mademoiselle Sophie Gamard; but to do justice in describing a person whose character will give the greatest interest to the trivial events of this drama, and to the antecedent lives of the figures playing a part in it, it will be well here to epitomise the ideas of which the old maid is the outcome. The habits of life form the soul, and the soul forms the countenance. If in society, as in the universe, everything must have a purpose, there yet are on this earth some existences of which the use and purpose are undiscoverable; morality and political economy alike reject the individual that consumes without producing, that fills a place on earth without diffusing either good or evil—for evil, no doubt, is a form of good of which the results are not immediately manifest. Very rarely does an old maid fail to place herself by her own act in this class of unproductive creatures. Now if the consciousness of work done gives productive beings a sense of satisfaction which helps them to endure life, the knowledge that they are a burthen on others, or even

merely useless, must produce the contrary effect, and give to the inert a contempt for themselves as great as that they provoke in others. This stern social reprobation is one of the causes which, unknown to themselves, contribute to implant in their soul the grievance which is stamped on their faces.

A prejudice, not perhaps without a basis of truth, everywhere gives rise—and in France more than elsewhere—to marked disfavour being felt towards a woman with whom no man has chosen to share his fortunes, or to endure the woes of life. And an age comes to unmarried women when the world, rightly or wrongly, condemns them on the strength of the disdain to which they are victims. If ugly, the amiability of their nature ought to have redeemed the imperfections of their persons; if pretty, their loneliness must have its cause in serious reasons. It is hard to decide which of the two classes is most to be contemned. If their single life is deliberately chosen, if it is a determination to be independent, neither men nor mothers can forgive them for having shirked the sacrifice of woman by refusing to know the passions that make her sex pathetic. To reject its sufferings is to forgo its poetry, to cease to deserve the sweet consolations to which a mother has always uncontested rights. Then the generous feelings, the exquisite qualities of woman, can only be developed by constant exercise. When she remains unmarried, a creature of the female sex is a self-contradiction: egoistical and cold, she fills us with horror.

This pitiless verdict is unfortunately too just for old maids to misinterpret its motives. These ideas germinate in their heart as naturally as the effects of their desolate life are imprinted on their features. Thus they wither, because the constant expansion, or the happiness that blooms in a woman's face and lends softness to her movements, has never existed in them. Then they grow

harsh and discontented, because a creature that fails of its purpose is unhappy, it suffers, and suffering brings forth viciousness. In fact, before an unmarried woman spites herself for her loneliness, she accuses the whole world, and from accusation there is but one step to the desire for revenge.

Again, the ill grace that disfigures their persons is an inevitable outcome of their life. Never having felt the necessity to please, elegance and good taste are unknown to them. This feeling gradually leads them to choose everything to suit their own convenience at the cost of what might be agreeable to others. Without quite understanding their dissimilarity to other women, at last they observe it and suffer from it. Jealousy is an indelible passion in the female heart. Old maids are jealous for nothing, and know only the woes of the single passion which men can forgive in women because it flatters them. Thus tormented on every side, and compelled to reject the development of their nature, old maids are always conscious of a moral uneasiness to which they never become accustomed. Is it not hard at any age, especially for a woman, to read a feeling of repugnance on every face, when it ought to have been her fate to inspire none but sensations of kindliness in the hearts of those about her? Hence an old maid's glance is always askance, not so much from modesty as from fear and shame.

Now, it is impossible that a person perpetually at war with herself, or at loggerheads with life, should leave others in peace and never envy their happiness. This world of gloomy ideas lay complete in Mademoiselle Gamard's dull grey eyes; and the broad, dark circle in which they were set spoke of the long struggles of her solitary life. All the wrinkles on her face were straight lines. The form of her brow, head, and cheeks was characterised by rigidity and hardness. Without heeding them, she left the hairs, once brown, of two or three

moles on her chin to grow as they would. Her thin lips scarcely covered her long but sufficiently white teeth. She was dark, and her hair had once been black, but terrible headaches had turned it white. This disaster led her to wear a front; but not knowing how to put it on so as to conceal the junction, there often was a small gap between her cap-border and the black ribbon that fastened this half wig, very carelessly curled. Her gown, of thin silk in summer, of merinos in winter, and always of Carmelite brown, fitted her ungraceful figure and thin arms rather too closely. Her collar, always limp, betrayed a throat whose reddish skin was as finely lined as an oak leaf looked at in the light.

Her parentage accounted for the faults of her figure. She was the daughter of a dealer in fire-logs, a peasant who had risen in the world. At eighteen she might have been fresh and plump, but not a trace was now left either of the white skin or the fine colour she boasted of having then had. The hues of her complexion had acquired the dull pallor common enough in very devout persons. An aquiline nose was of all her features that which most strongly expressed the despotism of her ideas, just as the flatness of her forehead revealed her narrowness of mind. Her movements had an odd abruptness bereft of all grace; and only to see her pull her handkerchief out of her bag and loudly blow her nose would have told you what her character and habits were. Fairly tall, she held herself very upright, justifying the remark of a naturalist, who explains the stiffness of old maids physiologically by declaring that all their joints anchylose. She walked so that the motion did not distribute itself equally over her whole person, or produce the graceful undulations that are so attractive in a woman; she moved all of a piece, so to speak, seeming to lift herself at every step, like the statue of the Commendatore. In her moments of good-humour she would give it out, as all old maids do, that she could

have been married, but that, happily, she had found out her lover's faithlessness in time, and she thus, without knowing it, passed judgment on her heart in favour of her sense of self-interest.

This typical figure of an old maid was suitably set against a background of the grotesque pattern, representing Turkish landscapes, of a satin wall-paper with which the dining-room was hung. Mademoiselle Gamard habitually occupied this room, ornamented by two consoles and a barometer. In the place occupied by each priest was a little footstool in worsted work of faded hues.

The public sitting-room, where she received company, was worthy of her. The room will be at once familiar when it is known that it went by the name of the yellow drawing-room; the hangings were yellow, the furniture and wall-paper yellow; on the chimney-shelf, in front of a mirror with a gilt frame, candlesticks and a clock in cut glass reflected a hard glitter to the eye. As to Mademoiselle Gamard's private sanctum, no one had ever been allowed to enter it. It could only be conjectured that it was full of the odds and ends, the shabby furniture, the rags and tatters, so to speak, which all old maids collect and cling to so fondly.

This was the woman who was destined to exert the greatest influence over the Abbé Birotteau's latter days. Having failed to exercise the energies bestowed on woman in the way intended by nature, and urged by the need of expending them, this old maid had thrown them into the sordid intrigue, the petty tittle-tattle of provincial life, and the selfish scheming which at last exclusively absorbs all old maids.

Birotteau, for his woe, had developed in Sophie Gamard the only feelings this unhappy creature could possibly know, those of hatred; these, till now latent, as a result of the calm monotony of a country-town life, whose horizon was to her more especially narrow, were

presently to become all the more intense for being wreaked on small things, and in a narrow sphere of activity. Birotteau was one of those men who are predestined to suffer everything, because, as they never foresee anything, they can avoid nothing; everything falls on them.

'Yes, it will be fine,' the Canon replied after a pause, seeming to come out of his meditations and to wish to fulfil the laws of good manners.

Birotteau, frightened at the time that had elapsed between the remark and the reply, since he, for the first time in his life, had swallowed his coffee without speaking, left the dining-room, where his heart was held as in a vice. Feeling his cup of coffee lie heavy on his stomach, he went to walk, sadly enough, up and down the narrow box-edged paths which marked out a star in the garden. But as he turned after his first round, he saw the Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard standing at the glass door of the drawing-room; he with his arms crossed, as motionless as the statue on a tomb, she leaning against the shutter-door. Both, as they watched him, seemed to be counting the number of his steps.

To a timid person there is nothing so distressing as being the object of inquisitive inspection; when it is made by the eyes of hatred, the sort of suffering it inflicts becomes an intolerable martyrdom. Presently the Abbé fancied that he was hindering Mademoiselle Gamard and the Canon from taking their walk. This notion, inspired alike by fear and by good-nature, acquired such proportions, that he abandoned the place. He went away, already thinking no more of his canonry, so greatly was he worried by the woman's maddening tyranny.

By chance, and happily for him, he was kept very busy at Saint-Gatien, where there were several funerals, a marriage, and two baptisms. This enabled him to forget his troubles. When his appetite warned him of

the dinner hour, he took out his watch in some alarm, seeing that it was some minutes past four. He knew Mademoiselle Gamard's punctuality, so he hurried home.

He saw the first course brought down again as he passed the kitchen. Then on going into the dining-room, the old maid said to him in a tone of voice which betrayed alike the harshness of a reproof and the glee of finding her boarder in fault, 'It is half-past four, Monsieur Birotteau; you knew we should not wait for you.'

The priest looked at the dining-room clock, and the arrangement of the gauze wrapper, intended to protect it from dust, showed him that his landlady had wound it in the course of the morning, and had allowed herself the pleasure of setting it faster than the clock of Saint-Gatien's. There was nothing to be said. The least word of the suspicion he had conceived would have sprung the most terrible and plausible of those explosions of eloquence which Mademoiselle Gamard, like all women of her class, could give vent to in such cases.

The thousand-and-one vexations that a maid-servant can inflict on her master, or a wife on her husband, in the daily course of private life, were imagined by Mademoiselle Gamard, who heaped them on her boarder. The way in which she plotted her conspiracies against the poor Abbé's domestic comfort bore the stamp of deeply malignant genius. She contrived never to be in the wrong.

By the end of a week after the opening of this tale, his life in the house, and his position towards Mademoiselle Gamard, revealed to him a plot, hatching for six months past. So long as the old maid had been covert in her revenge, and the priest could voluntarily keep up his self-deceit, refusing to believe in her malevolent purpose, the moral effects had made no great progress in him. But since the incidents of the displacement of the candlestick and the clock put too fast, Birotteau could no longer doubt that he was living under

the rule of an aversion that kept an ever-watchful eye on him. From this he rapidly sank into despair, for ever seeing Mademoiselle Gamard's lean and talon-like fingers ready to claw his heart.

The old maid, happy in living on a sentiment so teeming with excitement as revenge is, delighted in hovering and wheeling above the Abbé as a bird of prey hovers and circles over a field mouse before seizing it. She had long plotted a scheme which the bewildered priest could not possibly guess, and which she soon began to unfold, showing the genius that can be displayed in small things by isolated beings whose soul, incapable of apprehending the grandeur of true piety, has lost itself in the trivialities of devotion. The last and most frightful aggravation of his torments was that the nature of them prohibited Birotteau, an effusive man who loved to be pitied and comforted, from enjoying the little solace of relating them to his friends. The small amount of tact he owed to his shyness made him dread appearing ridiculous by troubling himself about such silly trifles. At the same time, these silly trifles made up his whole life, the life he loved, full of busy vacuity and vacuous business, a dull, grey life, in which too strong a feeling was a misfortune, and the absence of all excitement is happiness. Thus the poor Abbé's paradise had suddenly become a hell. In short, his torments were intolerable.

The terror with which he contemplated an explanation with Mademoiselle Gamard grew daily, and the secret misfortunes which blighted every hour of his old age injured his health. One morning, as he put on his speckled blue stockings, he observed that the circumference of his calf had shrunk by eight lines. Appalled at such a terribly unmistakable symptom, he determined to make an effort to persuade the Abbé Troubert to intervene officially between himself and Mademoiselle Gamard.

When he found himself in the presence of the imposing Canon, who came out of a study crammed with papers, where he was always at work, admitting nobody, to receive him in a bare room, the Abbé was almost ashamed to speak of Mademoiselle Gamard's petty aggravations to a man who seemed so seriously occupied. But after having suffered all the misery of mental deliberation which humble, weak, or irresolute persons go through, even with regard to trifles, he made up his mind to explain the position to the Canon, not without feeling his heart swollen by extraordinary throbs. Troubert listened with a cold, grave air, trying, but in vain, to control some smiles, which, to intelligent eyes, might have betrayed the satisfaction of a secret desire. A flash sparkled in his eye when Birotteau described to him, with the eloquence lent by true emotion, the bitterness that was incessantly poured out for him; but Troubert at once covered his eyes with his hand, a gesture common to great thinkers, and preserved his habitually dignified attitude.

When the Abbé ceased speaking, he would have been puzzled indeed if he had tried to read any sign of the feelings he imagined he should excite in this mysterious priest, on his face, mottled now with yellow patches—yellower than even his usual bilious complexion. After a moment's silence, the Canon made one of those replies of which every word must have been carefully studied to give them their full bearing, but which subsequently showed to capable persons the amazing depth of his mind and the power of his intellect.

He finally crushed Birotteau by saying that all these things surprised him the more, because, but for his brother's explanation, he would never have discerned them. He ascribed this dulness of perception to his important occupations, to his work, and to the supremacy of certain lofty thoughts, which did not allow of his heeding the trivialities of life? He pointed out, but

without assuming the airs of wishing to censure the conduct of a man whose years and learning commanded his respect, that 'the hermits of old rarely thought about their food, or their dwelling in the deserts, where they gave themselves up to holy contemplation,' and that 'in our days the priest could, in mind, make a desert for himself in every place.' Then, returning to Birotteau, he remarked that 'such squabbles were a quite new thing to him. During twelve years nothing of the kind had ever arisen between Mademoiselle Gamard and the venerated Abbé Chapeloud. As for himself, he could, no doubt, act as moderator between the priest and their landlady, since his friendship for her did not overstep the limits imposed by the laws of the Church on its faithful ministers; but then justice would require that he should also hear Mademoiselle Gamard. At the same time, he discerned no change in her; he had always seen her thus; he had willingly yielded to some of her vagaries, knowing that the excellent woman was kindness and sweetness itself; these little caprices of temper were to be ascribed to the sufferings caused by a pulmonary trouble, of which she never spoke, resigning herself to it as a true Christian.' He ended by saying that 'when he should have lived a few years longer with Mademoiselle, he would appreciate her better, and recognise the beauties of her admirable character.'

The Abbé Birotteau came away bewildered. Under the absolute necessity of taking counsel with himself alone, he gauged Mademoiselle Gamard by himself. The poor man thought that by absenting himself for a few days this woman's hatred would burn itself out for lack of fuel. So he determined to go, as he had done before now, to spend some time at a country place where Madame de Listomère always went at the end of the autumn, a season when, in Touraine, the sky is usually clear and mild. Poor man! He was thus carrying out the secret wishes of his terrible enemy, whose schemes

could not be thwarted by anything short of monk-like endurance; while he, guessing nothing, and not knowing his own business even, was doomed to fall like a lamb under the first blow from the butcher.

Lying on the slope between the town of Tours and the heights of Saint-Georges, facing the south, and sheltered by cliffs, Madame de Listomère's estate combined all the charms of the country with the pleasures of the town. It was not more than a ten-minutes' drive from the Bridge of Tours to the gate of this house, known as *l'Alouette* (the Lark)—an immense convenience in a place where no one will disturb himself for any earthly thing, not even in quest of pleasure.

The Abbé Birotteau had been about ten days at l'Alouette, when one morning, at the breakfast hour, the lodgekeeper came to tell him that Monsieur Caron wished to speak with him. Monsieur Caron was a lawyer employed by Mademoiselle Gamard. Birotteau, not remembering this, and conscious of no litigious difficulty to be settled with anybody in the world, left the table, not without some anxiety, to meet the lawyer; he found him sitting modestly on the parapet of a terrace.

'Your intention of remaining no longer as a resident under Mademoiselle Gamard's roof being now quite evident——' the man of business began.

'Dear me, Monsieur!' cried Birotteau, interrupting him, 'I never thought of leaving her.'

'And yet, Monsieur,' the lawyer went on, 'you must certainly have expressed yourself to that effect to Mademoiselle, since she has sent me to inquire whether you intend remaining long in the country. The event of a prolonged absence not having been provided for in your agreement, might give rise to some discussion. Now, as Mademoiselle Gamard understands it, your board——'

'Monsieur,' said Birotteau in surprise, and again inter-

rupting the lawyer, 'I did not think it could be necessary to take steps, almost legal in their nature, to——'

'Mademoiselle Gamard, wishing to preclude any difficulty,' said Monsieur Caron, 'has sent me to come to an understanding with you.'

'Very well, if you will be so obliging as to call again to-morrow, I, on my part, will have taken advice.'

'So be it,' said Caron with a bow.

The scrivener withdrew. The hapless priest, appalled by the pertinacity of Mademoiselle Gamard's persecution, went back to Madame de Listomère's dining-room looking quite upset. At his mere appearance every one asked him, 'Why, Monsieur Birotteau, what is the matter?'

The Abbé, greatly distressed, sat down without answering, so overwhelmed was he by the vague vision of his misfortune. But after breakfast, when several of his friends had gathered round a good fire in the drawing-room, Birotteau artlessly told them the tale of his catastrophe. The hearers, who were just beginning to be bored by their stay in the country, were deeply interested in an intrigue so completely in keeping with provincial life. Everybody took the Abbé's part against the old maid.

'Why!' cried Madame de Listomère, 'do you not plainly see that the Abbé Troubert wants your rooms?'

In this place the historian would have a right to sketch this lady's portrait; but it occurs to him that even those persons to whom Sterne's cognomology is unknown could surely not utter the three words MADAME DE LISTOMÈRE without seeing her—noble and dignified, tempering the austerity of piety by the antique elegance of monarchical and classic manners and polite distinction; kind, but a little formal; speaking slightly through her nose; allowing herself to read *la Nouvelle Héloïse*, and to go to the play; still wearing her own hair.

'The Abbé Birotteau must certainly not yield to that nagging old woman!' cried Monsieur de Listomère, a

lieutenant in the navy, spending a holiday with his aunt. 'If the Abbé has any courage, and will follow my advice, he will soon have recovered his peace of mind.'

In short, everybody began to analyse Mademoiselle Gamard's proceedings with the acumen peculiar to provincials, who, it certainly cannot be denied, possess the talent of laying bare the most secret human actions.

'You have not hit the mark,' said an old landowner who knew the country. 'There is something very serious under this which I have not yet mastered. The Abbé Troubert is far too deep to be so easily seen through. Our good friend Birotteau is only at the beginning of his troubles. In the first place, would he be happy and left in peace even if he gave up his rooms to Troubert? I doubt it.—If Caron came to tell you,' he went on, turning to the puzzled Abbé, 'that you had intended to leave Mademoiselle Gamard, with the object of getting you out of her house. . . . Well, you will have to go, willy nilly. That kind of man never risks a chance; they only play when they hold the trumps.'

This old gentleman, a certain Monsieur de Bourbonne, epitomised provincial ideas as completely as Voltaire epitomised the spirit of his time. This withered little old man professed in matters of dress all the indifference of a proprietor whose estate has a quotable value in the department. His countenance, tanned by the sun of Touraine, was shrewd rather than clever. He was accustomed to weigh his words, to consider his actions, and he concealed his deep caution under a delusive bluntness. The very least observation was enough to discover that, like a Norman peasant, he would get the advantage in every stroke of business. He was great in œnology—the favourite science of the Tourangeaux. He had managed to extend the circle of one of his estates by taking in the alluvial land of the Loire without getting into a lawsuit with the State. This achieve-

ment had established his reputation as a clever man. If, charmed by Monsieur de Bourbonne's conversation, you had asked his biography of one of his fellow provincials, 'Oh! he is a cunning old fox,' would have been the proverbial reply of all who envied him, and they were many. In Touraine, as in most provinces, jealousy lies at the base of the tongue.

Monsieur de Bourbonne's remark caused a brief silence, during which the members of this little committee seemed lost in thought.

At this juncture Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix was announced. She had just come from Tours, prompted by her wish to be of service to Birotteau, and the news she brought completely changed the aspect of affairs. At the moment when she came in, every one but the landowner was advising Birotteau to hold his own against Troubert and Gamard, under the auspices of the aristocratic party, who would support him.

'The Vicar-General,' said Mademoiselle Salomon, 'who has all the promotions in his hands, has just been taken ill, and the Archbishop has commissioned Canon Troubert to act in his place. The nomination to the canonry now depends entirely on him. Now yesterday, at Mademoiselle de la Blottière's, the Abbé Poirel was speaking of the annoyances Monsieur Birotteau occasioned to Mademoiselle Gamard, in such a way as to seem to justify the neglect which will certainly fall on our good Abbé. "The Abbé Birotteau is a man who badly needed the Abbé Chapeloud," said he, "and since that virtuous Canon's death it has been proved that——" Then came a series of suppositions and calumnies.—You understand?'

'Troubert will be made Vicar-General,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne solemnly.

'Come now,' cried Madame de Listomère, looking at Birotteau, 'which would you prefer—to be made Canon, or to remain with Mademoiselle Gamard?'

'To be made Canon,' was the general outcry.

'Well, then,' Madame de Listomère went on, 'the Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard must be allowed to have their way. Have they not conveyed to you indirectly by Caron's visit that, provided you consent to leave your rooms, you shall be made Canon. One good turn for another.'

Every one exclaimed at Madame de Listomère's acumen and sagacity; but her nephew, the Baron de Listomère, said in a comical tone to Monsieur de Bourbonne—

'I should have liked to see the battle between the *Gamard* and the *Birotteau*.'

But, for the Abbé's worse luck, the forces were not equal, with the worldly-wise on one side, and the old maid upheld by the Abbé Troubert on the other. The time was at hand when the struggle would become more decisive, and assume a greater scope and immense proportions.

By the advice of Madame de Listomère and most of her adherents, who were beginning to take a passionate interest in this intrigue flung into the vacuity of their country life, a footman was despatched for Monsieur Caron. The lawyer returned with amazing promptitude, a fact that alarmed no one but Monsieur de Bourbonne.

'Let us adjourn any decision till we have fuller information,' was the advice of this Fabius in a dressing-gown, whose deep reflections revealed to him some abstruse plan of battle on the Tours chessboard.

He tried to enlighten Birotteau as to the perils of his position. But the 'old fox's' shrewdness did not subserve the frenzy of the moment; he was scarcely listened to.

The meeting between the lawyer and Birotteau was brief. The Abbé came in looking quite scared, and saying, 'He requires me to sign a paper declaring my decession.'

'What barbarous word is that?' said the navy lieutenant.

'And what does it mean?' cried Madame de Listomère.

'It simply means that the Abbé is to declare his readiness to leave Mademoiselle Gamard's house,' replied Monsieur de Bourbonne, taking a pinch of snuff.

'Is that all?—Sign it!' said Madame de Listomère to Birotteau. 'If you have really made up your mind to quit her house, there can be no harm done by declaring your will.'—The *Will* of Birotteau!

'That is true,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne, shutting his snuff-box with a dry snap, of which it is impossible to render the full meaning, for it was a language by itself. 'But writing is always dangerous,' he added, placing the snuff-box on the chimney-shelf with a look that terrified the Abbé.

Birotteau was so bewildered by the upheaval of all his ideas, by the swiftness of events which had come on him and found him defenceless, and by the lightness with which his friends treated the most cherished circumstances of his lonely life, that he remained motionless, as if lost in the moon, not thinking of anything, but listening and trying to catch the sense of the hasty words everybody else was so ready with. He took up Monsieur Caron's document, and read it as though the lawyer's deed were in fact the object of his attention; but it was merely mechanical, and he signed the paper by which he declared himself ready and willing to give up his residence with Mademoiselle Gamard as well as his board, as provided by the agreement between them. When Birotteau had signed the deed Caron took it, and asked him where his client was to bestow the goods and chattels belonging to him. Birotteau mentioned Madame de Listomère's house, and the lady by a nod consented to receive the Abbé for some days, never doubting but that he would ere long be made a Canon. The old landowner wished to

see this sort of act of renunciation, and Monsieur Caron handed it to him.

'Why,' said he to the Abbé, after having read it, 'is there any written agreement between you and Mademoiselle Gamard? Where is it? What are the conditions?'

'The paper is in my rooms,' said Birotteau.

'Do you know its contents?' the old gentleman asked the lawyer.

'No, Monsieur,' said Monsieur Caron, holding out his hand for the ominous document.

'Ah, ha!' said Monsieur de Bourbonne to himself, 'you, master lawyer, are no doubt informed of what that agreement contains, but you are not paid to tell us.' And he returned the deed of 'decession' to the lawyer.

'Where am I to put all my furniture?' cried Birotteau, 'and my books, my beautiful library, my nice pictures, my red drawing-room—all my things, in short!'

And the poor man's despair at finding himself thus uprooted was so guileless, it so perfectly showed the purity of his life, and his ignorance of the world, that Madame de Listomère and Mademoiselle Salomon said, to comfort him, and in the tone that mothers use when they promise a child a plaything—

'There, there, do not worry yourself about such silly trifles. We shall easily find you a home less cold and gloomy than Mademoiselle Gamard's house. If no lodging is to be found to suit you—well, one of us will take you as a boarder. Come, play a hit at backgammon. You can call on the Abbé Troubert to-morrow to ask his support, and you will see how well he will receive you.'

Weak-minded persons are reassured as easily as they are frightened. So poor Birotteau, dazzled by the prospect of living with Madame de Listomère, forgot the ruin, now irremediably complete, of the happiness he had so long sighed for, and so thoroughly revelled in. Still,

at night, before falling asleep, with the anguish of a man to whom a removal, and the formation of new habits, were as the end of the world, he tortured his mind to imagine where he could find as convenient a home for his library as that corridor. As he pictured his books astray, his furniture dispersed, and his home broken up, he wondered a thousand times why his first year at Mademoiselle Gamard's had been so delightful, and the second so wretched. And again and again this disaster was a bottomless pit in which his mind was lost.

The canonry no longer seemed to him a sufficient compensation for so many misfortunes; he compared his life to a stocking in which one dropped stitch leads to a ladder all the way down the web. Mademoiselle Salomon was left to him. But, losing all his old illusions, the poor priest no longer dared believe in a new friend.

In the *città dolente* of old maids there are several, especially in France, whose life is a sacrifice nobly renewed day by day to noble feeling. Some remain proudly faithful to a heart which death untimely snatched from them; martyrs to love, they learn the secret of womanliness of soul. Others succumb to a family pride which, to our shame, is daily waxing less; they have devoted themselves to make the fortune of a brother, or to the care of orphan nephews; such women are mothers though remaining maids. These old maids rise to the highest heroism of their sex, by consecrating every womanly feeling to the worship of misfortune. They idealise the concept of woman, by renouncing all the rewards of her natural destiny, and accepting only its penalties. They live enshrined in the beauty of their self-sacrifice, and men reverently bow their heads before their faded forms. Mademoiselle de Sombreuil is neither wife nor maid; she was, and always will be, an embodied poem.

Mademoiselle Salomon was one of these heroic creatures. Her sacrifice was religiously sublime, inasmuch as it would remain inglorious after having been a daily anguish. Young and handsome, she was loved; her lover lost his reason. For five years she had devoted herself with the courage of love to the mechanical joys of the unhappy man; she was so fully wedded to his madness that she did not think him mad.

She was a woman of simple manners, frank in speech, with a pale face not devoid of character, though the features were regular. She never spoke of the experiences of her life. Only, now and then, the sudden shudder with which she heard the narrative of some dreadful or melancholy incident betrayed in her the fine qualities evolved by great sorrows. She had come to live at Tours after the death of her companion in life. There she could not be appreciated at her true value; she was regarded as a 'good creature.' She was very charitable, and attached herself by preference to the weak and helpless. For this reason she had, of course, the deepest interest in the unhappy priest.

Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix, driving into town early next morning, took Birotteau with her, set him down on the Cathedral quay, and left him making his way towards the Close, where he was in great haste to arrive, to save the canonry, at any rate, from the shipwreck, and to superintend the removal of his furniture. He rang, not without violent palpitations, at the door of the house, whither for fourteen years he had been in the habit of coming, in which he had dwelt, and whence he was now to be for ever exiled after dreaming that he might die there in peace like his friend Chapeloud.

Marianne was surprised to see him. He told her he had come to speak to Monsieur Troubert, and turned towards the ground-floor rooms in which the Canon lodged; but Marianne called out to him—

'The Abbé Troubert is not there, Monsieur le Vicaire; he is in your old rooms.'

These words were a fearful shock to Birotteau, who at last understood Troubert's character, and the unfathomable depth of revenge so slowly worked out, when he saw him quite at home in Chapeloud's library, seated in Chapeloud's fine Gothic chair—sleeping, no doubt, in Chapeloud's bed, using Chapeloud's furniture, contravening Chapeloud's will, in short, disinheriting Chapeloud's friend;—that very Chapeloud who had for so long penned him in at Mademoiselle Gamard's, hindered his advancement, and kept him out of the drawing-rooms of Tours. By what magic wand had this transformation been effected? Were these things no longer Birotteau's?

Indeed, as he noted the sardonic expression with which Troubert looked round on this library, Birotteau inferred that the future Vicar-General was secure of possessing for ever the plunder of the two men he had so bitterly hated—Chapeloud as an enemy, and Birotteau because in him he still saw Chapeloud. At the sight a thousand ideas surged up in the worthy man's heart and wrapped him in a sort of trance. He stood motionless, and, as it were, fascinated by Troubert's eye, which was fixed on him.

'I cannot suppose, Monsieur,' said Birotteau at last, 'that you would wish to deprive me of the things that are mine. Though Mademoiselle Gamard may have been impatient to move you, she must surely be just enough to allow me time to identify my books and remove my furniture.'

'Monsieur,' said the Canon coldly, and betraying no sort of feeling in his face, 'Mademoiselle Gamard told me yesterday that you were leaving; of the cause of it I know nothing. If she moved me up here, it was because she was obliged to do so. Monsieur l'Abbé Poirel has taken my rooms. Whether the furniture in these rooms

belongs to Mademoiselle, I know not. If it is yours, you know her perfect honesty; the saintliness of her life is a guarantee for it.

'As to myself, you know how plainly I live. For fifteen years I slept in a bare room, never heeding the damp, which is killing me by inches. At the same time, if you wish to return to these rooms, I am ready to give them up to you.'

As he listened to this terrible speech, Birotteau forgot the matter of the canonry; he went downstairs as briskly as a young man to find Mademoiselle Gamard, and met her at the bottom of the stairs in the large paved passage which joined the two parts of the house.

'Mademoiselle,' said he, bowing, and not heeding the sour, sardonic smile that curled her lips, or the extraordinary fire that gave her eyes a glare like a tiger's, 'I cannot understand why you did not wait till I had removed my furniture before——'

'What!' she exclaimed, interrupting him, 'have not all your things been taken to Madame de Listomèré's?'

'But my furniture?'

'Did you never read your agreement?' cried she, in tones which ought to be expressed in musical notation to show how many shades hatred could infuse into the accentuation of every word.

And Mademoiselle Gamard seemed to swell, her eyes flashed once more, and her face beamed; her whole person thrilled with satisfaction.

The Abbé Troubert opened a window to see better to read a folio volume.

Birotteau stood as if thunderstricken.

Mademoiselle Gamard trumpeted at him, in a voice as shrill as a clarion, the following words:—

'Was it not agreed that, in the event of your leaving my house, your furniture was to become mine to indemnify me for the difference between what you paid

me for your board, and what I received from the late respectable Abbé Chapeloud? Now, as Monsieur l'Abbé Poirel has been made Canon——'

At these last words Birotteau bowed slightly as if to take leave; then he rushed out of the house. He was afraid lest, if he stayed any longer, he should faint, and so give his relentless foes a too great triumph. Walking like a drunken man, he got back to Madame de Listomère's town house, where, in a lower room, he found his linen, clothes, and papers all packed into a trunk. At the sight of those relics of his property, the unhappy priest sat down and hid his face in his hands to hide his tears from the sight of men. The Abbé Poirel was Canon! He, Birotteau, found himself homeless, bereft of fortune and furniture.

Happily, Mademoiselle Salomon happened to drive past. The doorkeeper, understanding the poor man's despair, signalled to the coachman. After a few words of explanation between the lady and the porter, the Abbé allowed himself to be led to his faithful friend, though he could only answer her in incoherent words. Mademoiselle Salomon, alarmed by the temporary derangement of a brain already so feeble, carried him at once to l'Alouette, ascribing these symptoms of mental disturbance to the effect naturally produced on him by the Abbé Poirel's promotion. She knew nothing of the hapless priest's agreement with Mademoiselle Gamard, for the excellent reason that he himself did not know its full bearing. And as it is in the nature of things that comedy is often mixed up with the most pathetic incidents, Birotteau's bewildered answers almost made Mademoiselle Salomon laugh.

'Chapeloud was right,' said he; 'he is a monster.'

'Who?' said she.

'Chapeloud. He has robbed me of everything.'

'Then you mean Poirel?'

'No, Troubert.'

At length they reached l'Alouette, where the priest's friends lavished on him such effusive kindness, that by the evening he grew calmer, and they could extract from him an account of all that had occurred that morning.

Monsieur de Bourbonne, always phlegmatic, naturally asked to see the agreement which ever since the day before had seemed to him to contain the key to the riddle. Birotteau brought the fatal document out of his pocket, and held it out to the landowner, who read it hastily, presently coming to a sentence in these terms:—

'Whereas there is a difference of eight hundred francs a year between the price paid by the late Monsieur Chapeloud and the sum for which the aforenamed Sophie Gamard agrees to lodge and board, on the terms hereinbefore stated, the said François Birotteau; whereas the said François Birotteau fully acknowledges that it is out of his power for some years to come to pay the full price paid by Mademoiselle Gamard's boarders, and more especially by the Abbé Troubert; and, finally, whereas the said Sophie Gamard has advanced certain sums of money, the said Birotteau hereby pledges himself to bequeath to her, as an indemnity, the furniture of which he may be possessed at the time of his decease; or in the event of his voluntarily departing, for whatever cause or reason, and quitting the premises at present let to him, and no longer availing himself of the benefits contracted for in the agreement made by Mademoiselle Gamard hereinbefore——'

'Heaven above us! What impudence!' exclaimed Monsieur de Bourbonne. 'And what claws the said Sophie Gamard has!'

Poor Birotteau, never conceiving in his childish brain of any cause which could ever separate him from Mademoiselle Gamard, had counted on dying under her roof. He had not the least recollection of this clause, of which the terms had not even been discussed at the time when, in his eagerness to lodge with the old maid, he would

have signed all the documents she might have chosen to lay before him. His innocence was so creditable, and Mademoiselle Gamard's conduct so atrocious; there was something so deplorable in the fate of this hapless sexagenarian, and his weakness made him so pitiable, that in a first impulse of indignation Madame de Listomère exclaimed, 'I am the cause of your having signed the act that has ruined you; I ought to make up to you for the comfort you have lost.'

'But,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne, 'such proceedings constitute a fraud; there are grounds for an action——'

'Good, Birotteau shall bring an action. If he loses it at Tours, he will win it at Orleans; if he loses it at Orleans, he will win it at Paris!' cried the Baron de Listomère.

'If he means to bring an action, I should advise him first to resign his benefice in the Cathedral,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne calmly.

'We will take legal advice,' replied Madame de Listomère; 'and we will bring an action if we ought. But this business is so disgraceful for Mademoiselle Gamard, and may prove so damaging to the Abbé Troubert, that we can surely effect a compromise.'

After mature deliberation, everybody promised to assist the Abbé Birotteau in the struggle that must ensue between him and the allies of his enemies. A confident presentiment, an indescribable provincial instinct prompted every one to combine the names of Troubert and Gamard. But not a soul of those then assembled at Madame de Listomère's, excepting the 'old fox,' had any accurate notion of the importance of such a conflict.

Monsieur de Bourbonne took the poor priest into a corner.

'Of all the fourteen persons present,' said he in a low voice, 'not one will be still on your side within a fortnight. If you then want to call in help, you will perhaps find no one but myself bold enough to under-

take your defence, because I know the country, men, and things, and, better still, their interests. All your friends here, though full of good intentions, are starting on the wrong road, which you can never get out of. Listen to my advice. If you want to live in peace, give up your office in Saint-Gatien and leave Tours. Tell no one where you go, but seek a cure of souls far from hence, where Troubert can never again come across you.'

'Leave Tours!' cried the Abbé, with unspeakable dismay.

It was to him a form of death. Was it not tearing up all the roots by which he held to the world? Celibates make habits take the place of feelings. And when to this system of ideas, by which they go through life rather than live, they add a weak nature, external things have an astonishing dominion over them. Birotteau had really become a sort of vegetable; to transplant it was to endanger its guileless functions. Just as a tree, in order to live, must always find the same juices at hand, and always send its filaments into the same soil, so Birotteau must always patter round Saint-Gatien, always trot up and down the spot on the Mall where he was wont to walk, always go through the same familiar streets, and constantly frequent the three drawing-rooms where evening after evening he played whist or backgammon.

'To be sure—I was not thinking,' replied Monsieur de Bourbonne, looking compassionately at the priest.

Before long all Tours knew that Madame la Baronne de Listomère, widow of a Lieutenant-General, had given a home to the Abbé Birotteau, *Vicaire* of Saint-Gatien. This fact, on which several persons threw doubts, cut short all questions, and gave definiteness to party divisions, especially when Mademoiselle Salomon was the first to dare speak of fraud and an action at law.

Mademoiselle Gamard, with the subtle vanity and the

fanatical sense of personal importance that are characteristic of old maids, considered herself greatly aggrieved by the line of conduct taken by Madame de Listomère. The Baroness was a woman of high rank, elegant in her habits, whose good taste, polished manners, and genuine piety were beyond dispute. By sheltering Birotteau she formally gave the lie to all Mademoiselle Gamard's asseverations, indirectly censured her conduct, and seemed to sanction the Abbé's complaints of his former landlady.

For the better comprehension of this story, it is necessary here to explain how much power Mademoiselle Gamard derived from the discernment and analytical spirit with which old women can account to themselves for the actions of others, and to set forth the resources of her faction. Escorted by the always taciturn Abbé Troubert, she spent her evenings in four or five houses where a dozen persons were wont to meet, allied by common tastes and analogous circumstances. There were two or three old men, wedded to the whims and tittle-tattle of their cooks; five or six old maids, who spent their days in sifting the words and scrutinising the proceedings of their neighbours and those a little below them in the social scale; and finally, several old women wholly occupied in distilling scandal, in keeping an exact register of everybody's fortune, and a check on everybody's actions. They foretold marriages, and blamed their friends' conduct quite as harshly as their enemies'. These persons, filling in the town a position analogous to the capillary vessels of a plant, imbibed news with the thirst of a leaf for the dew, picked up the secrets of every household, discharged them and transmitted them mechanically to Monsieur Troubert, as leaves communicate to the plant the moisture they have absorbed. Thus, every evening of the week, these worthy bigots, prompted by the craving for excitement which exists in every one, struck an accurate balance of the position of the town with a sagacity worthy of the Council of

Ten, and made an armed police out of the unerring espionage to which our passions give rise. Then, as soon as they had found the secret motive of any event, their conceit led them to appropriate, severally, the wisdom of their Sanhedrim, and to give importance to their gossip in their respective circles.

This idle and busybody assembly, invisible though omniscient, speechless but for ever talking, had at that time an influence which was apparently harmless in view of its contemptibility, but which nevertheless could be terrible when it was animated by a strong motive. Now it was a very long time since any event had occurred within range of their lives to compare in general importance to each and all with the contest between Birotteau, supported by Madame de Listomère, and the Abbé Troubert with Mademoiselle Gamard. In fact, the three drawing-rooms of Madame de Listomère, Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottière, and Mademoiselle de Villenoix, being regarded as a hostile camp by those where Mademoiselle Gamard visited, there lay behind this quarrel a strong party spirit with all its vanities. It was the struggle of the Roman Senate and people in a molehill, or a tempest in a glass of water, as Montesquieu said in speaking of the Republic of San-Marino, where public officials held their places but a day, so easy it was to seize despotic power.

But this storm in a teacup evolved as many passions in the actors as would have sufficed to direct the largest social interests. Is it not a mistake to suppose that time flies swiftly only to those whose hearts are a prey to such vast projects as trouble life and make it boil? The Abbé Troubert's hours were spent as busily, flew loaded with thoughts as anxious, and marked by despair and hopes as deep, as could the racking hours of the man of ambition, the gamester, or the lover. God alone knows the secret of the energy we put forth to win the occult triumphs we achieve over men, or things, or ourselves.

Though we do not always know whither we are going, we know full well the fatigues of the voyage. Still, if the historian may be allowed to digress from the drama he is narrating, to assume for a moment the functions of the critic—if he may invite you to glance at the lives of these old maids and of these two priests, to investigate the causes of the misfortune which vitiated their inmost core—you will perhaps find it proved to a demonstration that man must necessarily experience certain passions if he is to evolve those qualities which give nobleness to life, which expand its limits and silence the selfishness natural to all beings.

Madame de Listomère returned to town, not knowing that for five or six days past several of her friends had been obliged to dispute a rumour concerning herself, and accepted by some, though she would have laughed at it had she heard of it, which attributed her affection for her nephew to almost criminal causes.

She took the Abbé to see her lawyer, who did not think an action an easy matter. The Abbé's friends, confident in the feeling that comes of the justice of a good case, or else dilatory about proceedings which did not concern them personally, had postponed the preliminary inquiry till the day when they should return to Tours. Thus Mademoiselle Gamard's allies had been able to make the first move, and had told the story in a way unfavourable to the Abbé Birotteau. Hence the man of law, whose clients consisted exclusively of the pious folks of the town, very much astonished Madame de Listomère by urging her on no account to be mixed up in such proceedings; and he closed the interview by saying that 'he, at any rate, would not undertake the case, because, by the terms of the agreement, Mademoiselle Gamard was right in the eye of the law; that in equity, that is to say, out of the jurisdiction of the Court, Monsieur Birotteau would appear in the eyes of the Bench and of all honest folks to have fallen away

from the meek, peace-loving, and conciliatory character he had hitherto enjoyed; that Mademoiselle Gamard, regarded as a gentle person and easy to live with, had accommodated Birotteau by lending the money needed to pay the succession duties arising from Chapeloud's bequest, without demanding any receipt; that Birotteau was not of an age, nor of a nature, to sign a document without knowing what it contained and recognising its importance; and that as he had ceased to live at Mademoiselle Gamard's after only two years' residence, whereas his friend Chapeloud had been with her for twelve years, and Troubert for fifteen, it could only be in accordance with some plan best known to himself. That, consequently, the action would be generally considered as an act of ingratitude,' etc.

After seeing Birotteau to the head of the stairs, the lawyer detained Madame de Listomère a moment as he showed her out, and besought her, as she loved her peace of mind, to have nothing to do with the affair.

In the evening, however, the hapless Abbé, as miserable as a criminal in the condemned cell at Bicêtre while awaiting the result of his petition to the court of appeal, could not keep himself from telling his friends of the result of his visit to the lawyer, at the hour before the card-parties were made up, when the little circle were assembling round Madame de Listomère's fire.

'I know no lawyer in Tours, excepting the solicitor for the Liberal party, who would undertake the case, unless he meant to lose it,' exclaimed Monsieur de Bourbonne, 'and I do not advise you to embark on it.'

'Well, it is a rascally shame!' said the navy lieutenant. 'I myself will take the Abbé to see that lawyer!'

'Then go after dark,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne, interrupting him.

'Why?'

'I have just heard that the Abbé Troubert is appointed

Vicar-General in the place of him who died the day before yesterday.'

'Much I care for the Abbé Troubert!'

Unluckily, the Baron de Listomère, a man of six-and-thirty, did not see the sign made to him by Monsieur de Bourbonne warning him to weigh his words, and pointing significantly at a town councillor who was known to be a friend of Troubert's. So the officer went on—

'If Monsieur Troubert is a rogue . . .'

'Dear me,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne, 'why bring the Abbé Troubert's name into a matter with which he has no concern whatever?'

'Nay,' said the lieutenant, 'is he not in the enjoyment of the Abbé Birotteau's furniture? I remember having called on Monsieur Chapeloud and seeing two valuable pictures. Suppose they are worth ten thousand francs? Can you believe that Monsieur Birotteau ever intended to give, in return for two years' board with this Gamard woman, ten thousand francs, when the library and furniture are worth almost as much more?'

The Abbé opened his eyes very wide on hearing that he had ever owned such an enormous fortune. And the Baron went on vehemently to the end.

'By Jove! Monsieur Salmon, an expert from the Paris gallery, happens to be here on a visit to his mother-in-law. I will go to him this very evening with Monsieur l'Abbé, and beg him to value the pictures. From thence I will take him to that lawyer.'

Two days after this conversation the action had taken shape. The solicitor to the Liberal party, now Birotteau's attorney, cast some obloquy on the Abbé's case. The Opposition to the Government, and some persons known to love neither priests nor religion—two things which many people fail to distinguish—took up the matter, and the whole town was talking of it. The expert from Paris had valued the *Virgin* by le Valentin,

and the *Christ* by Lebrun, at eleven thousand francs; they were both choice examples. As to the bookcase and the Gothic furniture, the fashionable taste, daily growing in Paris, for that style of work gave them an immediate value of twelve thousand francs. In short, the expert, on examination, estimated the contents of the rooms at ten thousand crowns.

Now, it was obvious that as Birotteau had never intended to give Mademoiselle Gamard this immense sum in payment of the little money he might owe her in virtue of the stipulated indemnity, there were grounds, legally speaking, for a new contract, otherwise the old maid would be guilty of unintentional fraud. So the lawyer on Birotteau's behalf began by serving a writ on Mademoiselle Gamard, formulating the Abbé's case. This statement, though exceedingly severe, and supported by quotations from leading judgments, and confirmed by certain articles of the Code, was at the same time a masterpiece of legal logic, and so evidently condemned the old maid, that thirty or forty copies were maliciously circulated in the town by the opposite party.

A few days after this commencement of hostilities between the old maid and Birotteau, the Baron de Listomère, who, as commander of a corvette, hoped to be included in the next list of promotions, which had been expected for some time at the Navy Board, received a letter, in which a friend informed him that there was, on the contrary, some idea in the office of placing him on the Retired List. Greatly amazed by this news, he at once set out for Paris, and appeared at the Minister's next reception. This official himself seemed no less surprised, and even laughed at the fears expressed by the Baron de Listomère.

Next day, in spite of the Minister's words, the Baron inquired at the office. With an indiscretion, such as is not unfrequently committed by heads of departments for their friends, a secretary showed him a minute confirming

the fatal news, ready drawn up, but which had not yet been submitted to the Minister, in consequence of the illness of a head clerk. The Baron at once went to call on an uncle, who, being a député, could without delay meet the Minister at the Chamber, and begged him to sound his Excellency as to his views, since to him this meant the sacrifice of his whole career. He awaited the closing of the sitting in his uncle's carriage in the greatest anxiety.

Long before the end his uncle came out, and as they drove home to his house he asked the Baron—

'What the devil led you to make war against the priesthood? The Minister told me at once that you had put yourself at the head of the Liberal party at Tours. Your opinions are detestable, you do not follow the line laid down by the Government, and what not! His phrases were as confused as if he were still addressing the Chamber. So then I said to him, "Come, let us understand each other." And his Excellency ended by confessing that you were in a scrape with the Lord High Almoner. In short, by making some inquiries among my colleagues, I learnt that you had spoken with much levity of a certain Abbé Troubert who, though but a Vicar-General, is the most important personage of the province, where he represents the ecclesiastical power. I answered for you to the Minister in person.—My noble nephew, if you want to get on in the world, make no enemies in the Church.

'Now, go back to Tours, and make your peace with this devil of a Vicar-General. Remember that Vicars-General are men with whom you must always live in peace. Deuce take it! When we are all trying to re-establish the Church, to cast discredit on the priests is a blunder in a ship's lieutenant who wants his promotion. If you do not make it up with this Abbé Troubert, you need not look to me; I shall cast you off. The Minister for Church affairs spoke to me of the man just now as

certain to be a Bishop. If Troubert took an aversion for our family, he might hinder my name from appearing in the next batch of peers.—Do you understand?'

This speech explained to the navy lieutenant what Troubert's secret occupations were, when Birotteau so stupidly remarked, 'I cannot think what good he gains by sitting up all night!'

The Canon's position, in the midst of the feminine senate which so craftily kept a surveillance over the province, as well as his personal capabilities, had led to his being chosen by the Church authorities from among all the priests in the town to be the unacknowledged proconsul of Touraine. Archbishop, General, Préfet—high and low were under his occult dominion.

The Baron de Listomère had soon made up his mind.

'I have no notion,' said he to his uncle, 'of receiving another ecclesiastical broadside below the water-line.'

Three days after this diplomatic interview between the uncle and nephew, the sailor, who had suddenly returned to Tours by the mail-coach, explained to his aunt, the very evening of his arrival, all the danger that would be incurred by the Listomère family if they persisted in defending that idiot Birotteau. The Baron had caught Monsieur de Bourbonne at the moment when the old gentleman was taking up his stick and hat to leave after his rubber. The 'old fox's' intelligence was indispensable to throw a light on the reefs among which the Listomères had been entangled; he rose so early to seek his hat and stick, only to be stopped by a word in his ear—

'Wait; we want to talk.'

The young Baron's prompt return, and his air of satisfaction, though contrasting with the gravity his face assumed now and then, had vaguely hinted to Monsieur de Bourbonne of some checks the lieutenant might have received in his cruise against Gamard and Troubert.

He manifested no surprise on hearing the Baron proclaim the secret power possessed by the Vicar-General.

'I knew that,' said he.

'Well, then,' exclaimed the Baroness, 'why did you not warn us?'

'Madame,' he hastily replied, 'if you will forget that I guessed this priest's occult influence, I will forget that you know it as well as I. If we should fail to keep the secret, we might be taken for his accomplices; we should be feared and hated. Do as I do. Pretend to be a dupe; but look carefully where you set your feet. I said quite enough; you did not understand me. I could not compromise myself.'

'What must we do now?' said the Baron.

The desertion of Birotteau was not a matter of question; it was the primary condition, and so understood by this council of three.

'To effect a retreat with all the honours of war has always been the greatest achievement of the most skilful generals,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne. 'Yield to Troubert; if his hatred is less than his vanity, you will gain an ally; but if you yield too much, he will trample on your body, for, as Boileau says, "Destruction is by choice the spirit of the Church." Make as though you were quitting the service, and you will escape him, Monsieur le Baron. Dismiss Birotteau, Madame, and you will gain Gamard her lawsuit. When you meet the Abbé Troubert at the Archbishop's, ask him if he plays whist; he will answer *Yes*. Invite him to play a rubber in this drawing-room, where he longs to be admitted; he will certainly come. You are a woman; try to enlist this priest in your interest. When the Baron is a ship's Captain, his uncle a Peer of France, and Troubert a Bishop, you can make Birotteau a Canon at your leisure. Till then yield; but yield gracefully, and with a threat. Your family can give Troubert quite as much assistance as he can give you; you will meet half-way to admira-

tion. And take soundings constantly as you go, sailor!'

'Poor Birotteau!' said the Baronne.

'Oh! begin at once,' said the old man as he took leave. 'If some clever Liberal should get hold of that vacuous brain, he would get you into trouble. After all, the law would pronounce in his favour, and Troubert must be afraid of the verdict. As yet he may forgive you for having begun the action, but after a defeat he would be implacable.—I have spoken.'

He snapped his snuff-box lid, went to put on his thick shoes, and departed.

The next morning, after breakfast, the Baroness remained alone with Birotteau, and said to him, not without visible embarrassment—

'My dear Monsieur Birotteau, I am going to make a request that you will think very unjust and inconsistent; but both for your sake and for ours you must, in the first place, put an end to your action against Mademoiselle Gamard by renouncing your claims, and also quit my house.'

As he heard these words the poor priest turned pale.

'I am the innocent cause of your misfortunes,' she went on; 'and I know that but for my nephew you would never have begun the proceedings which now are working woe for you and for us. Listen to me.'

And she briefly set forth the immense scope of this affair, explaining the seriousness of its consequences. Her meditations during the night had enabled her to form an idea of what the Abbé Troubert's former life had been. Thus she could unerringly point out to Birotteau the web in which he had been involved by this skilfully-plotted vengeance, could show him the superior cleverness and power of the enemy, revealing his hatred and explaining its causes; she pictured him as crouching for twelve years to Chapeloud, and now devouring and persecuting Chapeloud in the person of his friend.

The guileless Birotteau clasped his hands as if to pray, and wept with grief at this vision of human wickedness which his innocent soul had never conceived of. Terrified, as though he were standing on the verge of an abyss, he listened to his benefactress with moist and staring eyes, but without expressing a single idea. She said in conclusion—

'I know how vile it is to desert you; but, my dear Abbé, family duties must supersede those of friendship. Bend before this storm, as I must, and I will prove my gratitude. I say nothing of your personal concerns; I undertake them; you shall be released from money difficulties for the rest of your life. By the intervention of Monsieur de Bourbonne, who will know how to save appearances, I will see that you lack nothing. My friend, give me the right to throw you over. I shall remain your friend while conforming to the requirements of the world.—Decide.'

The hapless Abbé, quite bewildered, exclaimed—

'Ah! then Chapeloud was right when he said that if Troubert could drag him out of his grave by the heels, he would do it!—He sleeps in Chapeloud's bed!'

'It is no time for lamentations,' said Madame de Listomère. 'We have no time to spare. Come——'

Birotteau was too kind-hearted not to submit in any great crisis to the impulsive self-sacrifice of the first moment. But, in any case, his life already was but one long martyrdom.

He answered with a heartbroken look at his protectress, which wrung her soul—

'I am in your hands. I am no more than a straw in the street!'

The local word he used, *bourrier*, is peculiar to Touraine, and its only literal rendering is a straw. But there are pretty little straws, yellow, shiny, and smart, the delight of children; while a *bourrier* is a dirty, colourless, miry straw, left in the gutter, driven by the wind, crushed by the foot of every passer-by.

'But, Madame,' he went on, 'I should not wish to leave the portrait of Chapeloud for the Abbé Troubert. It was done for me, and belongs to me; get that back for me, and I will give up everything else.'

'Well,' said Madame de Listomère, 'I will go to Mademoiselle Gamard.' She spoke in a tone which showed what an extraordinary effort the Baronne de Listomère was making in stooping to flatter the old maid's conceit. 'And I will try to settle everything,' she went on. 'I hardly dare hope it.—Go and see Monsieur de Bourbonne. Get him to draw up your act of renunciation in due form, and bring it to me signed and witnessed. With the help of the Archbishop, I may perhaps get the thing settled.'

Birotteau went away overpowered. Troubert had assumed in his eyes the proportions of an Egyptian pyramid. The man's hands were in Paris, and his elbows in the Close of Saint-Gatien.

'He,' said he to himself, 'to hinder Monsieur le Marquis de Listomère being made a peer of France!—And then, "With the help of the Archbishop, perhaps get the thing settled"!'

In comparison with such high interests, Birotteau felt himself a grasshopper; he was honest to himself.

The news of Birotteau's removal was all the more astounding because the reason was undiscoverable. Madame de Listomère gave out that as her nephew wished to marry and retire from the service, she needed the Abbé's room to add to her own. No one as yet had heard that Birotteau had withdrawn the action. Monsieur de Bourbonne's instructions were thus judiciously carried out.

These two pieces of news, when they should reach the ears of the Vicar-General, must certainly flatter his vanity, by showing him that, though the Listomère family would not capitulate, it would at least remain neutral, tacitly recognising the secret power of the

Church Council; and was not recognition submission? Still, the action remained *sub judice*. Was not this to yield and to threaten?

Thus the Listomères had assumed an attitude precisely similar to that of the Abbé Troubert in this contest; they stood aside, and could direct their forces.

But a serious event now occurred, and added to their difficulties, hindering the success of the means by which Monsieur de Bourbonne and the Listomères hoped to mollify the Gamard and Troubert faction. On the previous day Mademoiselle Gamard had taken a chill on coming out of the Cathedral, had gone to bed, and was reported to be seriously ill. The whole town rang with lamentations, excited by spurious commiseration. 'Mademoiselle Gamard's highly-strung sensibilities had succumbed to the scandal of this lawsuit. Though she was undoubtedly in the right, she was dying of grief. Birotteau had killed his benefactress.' This was the sum and substance of the phrases fired off through the capillary ducts of the great feminine synod, and readily repeated by the town of Tours.

Madame de Listomère suffered the humiliation of calling on the old woman without gaining anything by her visit. She very politely requested to be allowed to speak to the Vicar-General. Flattered, perhaps, at receiving a woman who had slighted him, in Chapeloud's library, by the fireplace over which the two famous pictures in dispute were hanging, Troubert kept the Baroness waiting a minute, then he consented to see her.

No courtier, no diplomate, ever threw into the discussion of private interests or national negotiations greater skill, dissimulation, and depth of purpose than the Baroness and the Abbé displayed when they found themselves face to face.

Old Bourbonne, like the sponsor, in the Middle Ages,

who armed the champion, and fortified his courage by good counsel as he entered the lists, had instructed the Baroness—

'Do not forget your part; you are a peacemaker, and not an interested party. Troubert likewise is a mediator. Weigh your words. Study the tones of the Vicar-General's voice.—If he strokes his chin, you have won him.'

Some caricaturists have amused themselves by representing the contrast that so frequently exists between what we say and what we think. In this place, to represent fully the interesting points of the duel of words that took place between the priest and the fine lady, it is necessary to disclose the thoughts they each kept concealed under apparently trivial speech.

Madame de Listomère began by expressing the regret she felt about this lawsuit of Birotteau's, and she went on to speak of her desire of seeing the affair settled to the satisfaction of both parties.

'The mischief is done, Madame,' said the Abbé. 'The admirable Mademoiselle Gamard is dying.' ('*I care no more for that stupid creature than for Prester John*,' thought he, '*but I should like to lay her death at your door, and burthen your conscience, if you are silly enough to care.*')

'On hearing of her illness,' said the Baroness, 'I desired the Abbé to sign a withdrawal, which I have brought to that saintly person.' ('*I see through you*,' thought she, '*you old rascal; but we are no longer at the mercy of your vagaries. As for you, if you accept the deed, you will have put your foot in it; it will be a confession of complicity.*')

There was a brief silence.

'Mademoiselle Gamard's temporal affairs are no concern of mine,' said the priest at length, closing the deep lids over his eagle eyes to conceal his excitement. ('*Ah, ha, you will not catch me tripping! But God be*

praised, those cursed lawyers will not fight out a case that might bespatter me! But what on earth can the Listomères want, that they are so humble?')

'Monsieur,' replied the Baronne, 'the concerns of Monsieur l'Abbé Birotteau interest me no more than those of Mademoiselle Gamard do you. But, unluckily, religion might suffer from their quarrels, and in you I see but a mediator, while I myself come forward as a peace-maker . . .' ('*We can neither of us throw dust in the other's eyes, Monsieur Troubert*,' thought she. '*Do you appreciate the epigram in that reply?*')

'Religion! Madame,' said the Vicar-General. 'Religion stands too high for man to touch it.' ('*Religion means me*,' thought he.) 'God will judge us unerringly, Madame,' he added, 'and I recognise no other tribunal.'

'Well, then, Monsieur,' replied she, 'let us try to make man's judgments agree with God's.' ('*Yes, Religion means you.*')

The Abbé Troubert changed his tone.

'Has not Monsieur your nephew just been to Paris?' ('*You heard of me there, I fancy*,' thought he; '*I can crush you—you who scorned me! You have come to surrender.*')

'Yes, Monsieur, thank you for taking so much interest in him. He is returning to Paris to-night, ordered there by the Minister, who is kindness itself to us, and does not wish him to retire from the service.' ('*No, Jesuit, you will not crush us*,' thought she; '*we understand your little game.*') A pause. 'I have not approved of his conduct in this affair,' she went on, 'but a sailor may be forgiven for not understanding the law.' ('*Come, let us be allies*,' thought she; '*we shall gain nothing by squabbling.*')

A faint smile dawned, and was lost, in the furrows of the Abbé's face.

'He has done us some service by informing us of the value of those two pictures,' said he, looking at them; 'they will be a worthy ornament to the Lady Chapel.'

('*You fired an epigram at me, Madame*,' thought he; '*there are two for you, and we are quits*.')

'If you present them to Saint-Gatien, I would beg you to allow me to offer to the Church two frames worthy of the place and of the gift.' ('*I should like to make you confess that you coveted Birotteau's property*,' thought she.)

'They do not belong to me,' said the priest, well on his guard.

'Well, here is the deed that puts an end to all dispute,' said Madame de Listomère, 'and restores them to Mademoiselle Gamard.' She laid the document on the table. ('*You see, Monsieur, how much I trust you*,' thought she.) 'It is worthy of you, Monsieur, worthy of your fine character, to reconcile two Christians, though I have ceased to take much interest in Monsieur Birotteau.'

'But he is your pensioner,' said he, interrupting her.

'No, Monsieur, he is no longer under my roof.' ('*My brother-in-law's peerage and my nephew's promotion are leading me into very mean actions*,' thought she.)

The Abbé remained unmoved, but his calm aspect was a symptom of violent agitation. Only Monsieur de Bourbonne had divined the secret of that superficial calm. The priest was triumphant.

'Why, then, did you take charge of his act of renunciation?' he asked, moved by a feeling similar to that which makes a woman fish for compliments.

'I could not help feeling some pity for him. Birotteau, whose feeble character must be well known to you, entreated me to see Mademoiselle Gamard in order to obtain from her, as the price of the surrender of——,' the Abbé frowned—'of his *rights*, as recognised by many distinguished lawyers, the portrait—' the priest looked hard at Madame de Listomère—'of Chapeloud,' she said. 'I leave it to you to judge of his claim to it . . .' ('*You would lose if you fought the case*,' thought she.)

The tone in which the Baroness uttered the words 'distinguished lawyers,' showed the priest that she knew the enemy's strength and weakness. Madame de Listomère displayed so much skill to this experienced connoisseur, that at the end of this conversation, which was carried on for some time in the same key, he went down to see Mademoiselle Gamard to bring her answer as to the proposed bargain.

Troubert soon returned.

'Madame,' said he, 'I can but repeat the poor dying woman's words, "Monsieur l'Abbé Chapeloud showed me too much kindness," said she, "for me to part from his portrait."—As for myself, if it were mine, I would not give it up to any one. I was too faithfully attached to my poor dead friend not to feel that I have a right to claim his likeness against anybody in the world.'

'Well, Monsieur, do not let us fall out over a bad picture.' ('*I care for it no more than you do*,' thought she.) 'Keep it; we will have it copied. I am proud to have brought this sad and deplorable lawsuit to an end, and I have personally gained the pleasure of making your acquaintance.—I have heard that you are a fine whist player. You will forgive a woman for being curious,' she added with a smile. 'If you will come and play occasionally at my house, you cannot doubt that you will be heartily welcomed.'

The Abbé Troubert stroked his chin. ('*He is caught; Bourbonne was right*,' thought she, '*he has his share of vanity*.')

In fact, the Vicar-General was at this moment enjoying the delicious sensation which Mirabeau found irresistible when, in the day of his power, he saw the gates of some mansion which had formerly been closed against him, opened to admit his carriage.

'Madame,' replied he, 'my occupations are too important to allow of my going into society; but for you what would not a man do?' ('*It is all over with the*

old girl; I will make up to the Listomères, and do them a good turn if they do me one,' thought he. '*It is better to have them for friends than for enemies.*')

Madame de Listomère went home, hoping that the Archbishop would complete a pacification so happily begun. But Birotteau was to gain nothing even by his renunciation. Madame de Listomère heard next day that Mademoiselle Gamard was dead. The old maid's will being opened, no one was surprised to learn that she had constituted the Abbé Troubert her universal legatee. Her property was estimated at a hundred thousand crowns. The Vicar-General sent two invitations to the service and burial to Madame de Listomère's house—one for herself, and the other for her nephew.

'We must go,' said she.

'That is just what it means!' exclaimed Monsieur de Bourbonne. 'It is a test by which Monseigneur Troubert meant to try you. Baron, you must go all the way to the grave,' he added to the navy lieutenant, who, for his sins, had not yet left Tours.

The service was held, and was marked by ecclesiastical magnificence. One person only shed tears. That was Birotteau, who, alone in a side chapel where he was not seen, believed himself guilty of this death, and prayed fervently for the soul of the departed, bitterly bewailing himself because he had not obtained her forgiveness for having wronged her.

The Abbé Troubert followed his friend's body to the grave in which she was to be laid. Standing on its brink, he delivered an address, and, thanks to his eloquence, gave monumental dignity to his picture of the narrow life led by the testatrix. The bystanders noted these words in the peroration:—

'This life, full of days devoted to God and to Religion—this life, adorned by so many beautiful actions performed in silence, so many modest and unrecognised virtues, was blighted by a sorrow which we would call

unmerited if, here, on the verge of eternity, we could forget that all our afflictions are sent us by God. This holy woman's many friends, knowing how noble was her guileless soul, foresaw that she could endure anything excepting only such detraction as would affect her whole existence. And so perhaps Providence has taken her to rest in God only to rescue her from our petty griefs. Happy are they who here on earth can live at peace with themselves, as Sophie now reposes in the realms of the blest, in her robe of innocence!'

'And when he had ended this grandiloquent discourse,' said Monsieur de Bourbonne, who reported all the details of the funeral to Madame de Listomère that evening when, the rubbers ended and the doors closed, they were left alone with the Baron, 'imagine, if you can, that Louis XI. in a priest's gown giving the holy-water sprinkler a final flourish in this style'—and Monsieur de Bourbonne took up the tongs and imitated the Abbé Troubert's movement so exactly that the Baron and his aunt could not help smiling. 'In this alone,' added the old man, 'did he betray himself. Till then his reserve had been perfect; but now, when he had packed away for ever the old maid he so utterly despised and hated, almost as much perhaps as he had detested Chapeloud, he, no doubt, found it impossible to hinder his satisfaction from betraying itself in a gesture.'

Next morning Mademoiselle Salomon came to breakfast with Madame de Listomère, and as soon as she came in she said quite sadly—

'Our poor Abbé Birotteau has just been dealt a dreadful blow which reveals the most elaborately studied hatred. He is made Curé of Saint-Symphorien.'

Saint-Symphorien is a suburb of Tours lying beyond the bridge. This bridge, one of the finest works of French architecture, is nearly two thousand feet long, and the open squares at each end are exactly alike.

'Do you understand?' she added after a pause, amazed at the coolness with which Madame de Listomère heard this news. 'The Abbé Birotteau will there be a hundred leagues from Tours, from his friends, from everything. Is it not exile, and all the more terrible because he will be torn from the town that his eyes will behold every day, while he can hardly ever come to it? He who, since his troubles, has hardly been able to walk, will be obliged to come a league to see us. At the present moment the poor man is in bed with a feverish attack. The priest's residence at Saint-Symphorien is cold and damp, and the parish is too poor to restore it. The poor old man will be buried alive in a real tomb. What a villainous plot!'

It will now, perhaps, suffice in conclusion of this story to report briefly a few subsequent events, and to sketch a last picture.

Five months later the Vicar-General was a Bishop; Madame de Listomère was dead, leaving fifteen hundred francs a year to the Abbé Birotteau. On the day when the Baroness's will was read, Monseigneur Hyacinthe, Bishop of Troyes, was about to leave Tours and take up his residence in his diocese; but he postponed his departure. Furious at having been deceived by a woman to whom he had offered a hand, while she was secretly holding out hers to the man whom he chose to regard as an enemy, Troubert again threatened to mar the Baron's career and hinder the Marquis de Listomère from receiving his peerage. In full council, at the Archbishop's palace, he uttered one of those priestly speeches, big with revenge, though smooth with honeyed mildness.

The ambitious lieutenant came to see this ruthless prelate, who dictated hard terms no doubt, for the Baron's conduct showed absolute subservience to the terrible Jesuit's will.

The new Bishop, by a deed of gift, bestowed Mademoiselle Gamard's house on the Cathedral Chapter; he gave Chapeloud's bookcase and books to the little Seminary; he dedicated the two disputed pictures to the Lady Chapel; but he kept the portrait of Chapeloud. No one could understand this almost complete surrender of all Mademoiselle Gamard's property. Monsieur de Bourbonne imagined that he secretly kept all the actual money to enable him to maintain his rank in Paris, if he should be called to sit on the Bench of Bishops in the Upper Chamber.

At last, on the very day before Monseigneur Troubert left Tours, the 'old fox' detected the last plot which these gifts had covered, a *coup de grâce* dealt by the most relentless vengeance to the most helpless of victims. The Baron de Listomère disputed Madame de Listomère's bequest to Birotteau on the ground of undue influence! Within a few days of the first steps being taken in this action, the Baron was appointed to a ship with the rank of captain; the Curé of Saint-Symphorien was, by an act of discipline, placed under an interdict. His ecclesiastical superiors condemned him by anticipation; so the assassin of the late Sophie Gamard was a rogue as well! Now, if Monseigneur Troubert had kept the old maid's property, he could hardly have secured Birotteau's disgrace.

At the moment when Monseigneur Hyacinthe, Bishop of Troyes, was passing in a post-chaise, along the quay of Saint-Symphorien, on his way to Paris, poor Birotteau had just been brought out in an armchair to sit in the sun on a terrace. The unhappy priest, stricken by his archbishop, was pale and haggard. Grief, stamped on every feature, had completely altered the face, which of old had been so blandly cheerful. Ill health had cast a dimness that simulated thought over his eyes, which had been bright once with the pleasures of good living, and devoid of any weight of ideas. This was but the

skeleton of that Birotteau who, only a year ago, vacuous but happy, had waddled across the Close. The Bishop shot a glance of contempt and pity at his victim; then he vouchsafed to forget him, and passed on.

In other times Troubert would certainly have been a Hildebrand or an Alexander VI. Nowadays the Church is no longer a political force, and does not absorb all the powers of isolated men. Hence celibacy has this crying evil, that by concentrating the powers of a man on one single passion, namely, egoism, it makes the unwedded soul mischievous or useless.

We live in a time when the fault of most governments is that they make man for society rather than society for man. A perpetual struggle is going on between the individual and the system that tries to turn him to account, while he tries to turn it to account for his own advantage; formerly, man having really more liberty, showed greater generosity for the public weal. The circle in which men move has insensibly widened; the soul that can apprehend it synthetically will never be anything but a grand exception, since, constantly, in moral as in physical force, what is gained in extent is lost in intensity. Society cannot be based on exceptions.

Originally, man was simply and solely a father; his heart beat warmly, concentrated within the radius of the family. Later on he lived for the Clan or for a small Republic; hence the grand historical heroism of Greece and Rome. Next, he became the member of a caste, or of a religion, and often was truly sublime in his devotion to its greatness; but then the field of his interests was increased by the addition of every intellectual realm. In these days his life is bound up with that of a vast fatherland; ere long his family will be the whole human race.

Will not this moral cosmopolitanism, the thing the Roman Church hopes for, be a sublime mistake? It is so natural to believe in that noble chimera—the brotherhood of men. But, alas! the human machine has not such

godlike proportions. The souls that are vast enough to wed a sentiment that is the prerogative of a great man will never be those of plain citizens, of fathers of families.

Certain physiologists opine that if the brain expands, the heart must necessarily shrink. That is a mistake. Is not what looks like egoism in the men who bear in their breast a science, a nation, or its laws, the noblest of passions? Is it not, in a way, a motherhood of the people? To bring forth new races or new ideas, must they not combine in their powerful brain the breast of the mother with the force of God? The history of an Innocent III., of a Peter the Great, of all who have guided an epoch or a nation, would at need prove to be, in the highest order of minds, the immense idea represented by Troubert in the depths of the Close of Saint-Gatien.

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